Cook's Country

SEPTEMBER 2015

A random stop at a Massachusetts antique store—which turned out to be a bakery as well—provided the inspiration for these sweet, crumbly mixed berry scones. Three weeks in the test kitchen perfected them. PAGE 17

Big Berry Scones

Ranch-Style Fried Chicken

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Dear Country Cook,

In the late 1950s, our Vermont cabin had a fieldstone barbecue under two large apple trees, just up from the garden. It wasn't used that often—the adults were usually enjoying sunset cocktails instead of grilling—but my sister Kate and I always liked outdoor cooking. It was a change in the routine, a bit of smoky adventure with heat, sparks, and sizzle. And, as the coals died down, it was also perfect for marshmallows skewered on long whips of apple branch, snapped from the tree above.

Those were summers of corn silk smoked in corncob pipes, burn barrels, homemade peach ice cream, and pond water so cold it grabbed your breath. There were frogs and crayfish, brook trout and rabbits, woodchucks and crows. There were tree stands, roofless barns, and a small copse of sun-dappled fern hidden deep in the woods.

A barbecue is one small step outside, but when you keep on walking, you find bits and pieces of the forgotten: broken pottery, pickle jars, rusted horse-drawn mowers, and abandoned cellar holes.

Kate and I ventured out beyond the edges of the known and found a world unexpected, a landscape that is still familiar today.

Christopher Kimball
Founder and Editor, Cook's Country

Photograph: Getty Images

Cook's Country

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2015

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No-Fail Recipes from Across the USA

We traveled the country to sample the best dishes America has to offer, from New England Clam Chowder to Hawaiian Fried Rice. The result? Our newest book, ***Cook's Country Eats Local***, with 150 of our best regional recipes. No matter where you live, you should be making these.

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ON THE COVER: ***Mixed Berry Scones***, Keller + Keller, Catrine Kelty
ILLUSTRATION: Greg Stevenson

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AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN
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America's Test Kitchen is a very real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of *Cook's Country* and *Cook's Illustrated* magazines and the workday destination of more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountry.com) and *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchen.com) on public television.

Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

The Color of Cornmeal

Can I use white and yellow cornmeal interchangeably in recipes? Do they taste the same?
–Sandy Smith, Deep Run, N.C.

The color of cornmeal comes from the variety of corn from which it is milled. Besides the common white and yellow kinds you find at most grocery stores, some companies mill red and blue varieties, too. To see if there is a noticeable flavor difference, we made our Old-Fashioned Corn Muffins, Hushpuppies, and Easy Baked Polenta with yellow cornmeal and then with white cornmeal.

With the corn muffins, a few tasters did detect sweeter notes, stronger corn flavor, and a slightly more delicate crumb in the batch made with yellow cornmeal. However, in the tastings of the hushpuppies and polenta, we did not find strong flavor or textural differences (though visually many tasters preferred the look of the yellow cornmeal).

While most of our recipes work with yellow or white cornmeal, our testing here did confirm a more important distinction: Coarseness is key. When a recipe calls for a specific grind of cornmeal, be sure to use what's called for, as it can greatly affect the texture of the final product. If the recipe does not specify, use finely ground. The test kitchen's favorite finely ground cornmeal is Arrowhead Mills Organic Yellow Cornmeal.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Feel free to use white and yellow cornmeal interchangeably in recipes since flavor differences are minor. Just be sure to pay attention to the grind.

Heavy Cream Substitute?

I try to avoid dairy. Can I substitute coconut cream for heavy cream in chocolate ganache?
–Betty Schoenegge, Denver, Colo.

At its most basic, chocolate ganache is a simple formula of two ingredients: melted chocolate and heavy cream. Would coconut cream make a reasonable substitution for those who avoid dairy? To find out, we made side-by-side batches of dark chocolate ganache, one with heavy cream and one with coconut cream. The samples were surprising. In the batch made with coconut cream, tasters did detect slight coconut flavor. They also noticed slightly muted chocolate flavor and a somewhat less luxurious texture. These were minor, however, and overall most tasters thought that the coconut cream worked well as a substitute.

Out of curiosity we also tried coconut cream as a substitute in other applications, including creamy tomato soup, creamed onions, and crème brûlée. None of these applications worked nearly as well as the dark chocolate ganache. Both the tomato soup and onions tasted oddly sweet and oily, and the crème brûlée using coconut cream never fully set up. Given these results, we'd stick with just using it in ganache.

THE BOTTOM LINE: You can substitute coconut cream for heavy cream in dark chocolate ganache. But it does not work in other applications we tried.

Does Time Equal Balance?

Why do certain recipes call for you to let flavors meld in a soup or dressing? Does this actually do anything?
–Teddy Sue White, Barksdale, Texas

Have you ever noticed that many dishes taste better the next day? To understand why, I asked our science editor. He explained that when a food contains both water and fat, it takes time for fat-soluble flavors to diffuse into the water and water-soluble flavors to diffuse into the fat to form a uniform blend of flavors.

To test this, we made two batches each of hummus, green goddess dressing, and chili that all had directions to let flavors meld. For each test, we tasted one batch immediately and gave the other time to meld. Tasters detected strong differences between the samples in all three tests. With the hummus and green goddess dressing, the just-mixed versions tasted more "sharp" and "pungent," whereas the melded ones tasted more "balanced." For the chili, the freshly made version tasted flatter in comparison with the more flavorful cooled-and-reheated version.

THE BOTTOM LINE: When a recipe calls for you to let flavors meld, do it: It allows time for all the flavors to blend together, giving you a more balanced dish.

Proper Tenting

I've read that tenting meat can ruin its crust. Is this true? Is there a "best way" to tent meat?
–Steve O'Neill, Chicago, Ill.

Here in the test kitchen, we often call for tenting meat with foil to keep it warm while it rests. And because it can affect carryover cooking (meat's temperature continues to rise for a few minutes after it's pulled from the oven), we often build it into our recipe times.

We tested different cuts of meat not tented, tented, and with the foil tightly crimped around the plate the meat was resting on. Our results depended on the roast in question. We do not suggest tenting skin-on chicken or turkeys when you're looking for crispy skin, because tenting traps steam and sogs out the skin. We do, however, suggest tenting steaks, beef roasts, and pork roasts, so long as they don't have a glaze. These meats are often cooked to lower temperatures, so the foil plays a bigger role in keeping the temperature of the meat from dropping. And in our testing, the crusts on these meats did not soften significantly when tented. When the meats were glazed, however, the foil often hit and damaged the glaze, and the trapped steam compromised the glazy texture.

Unless a recipe calls for something more specific, we found that tenting works best when the foil is loosely placed on top of the meat in an upside-down V. You shouldn't crimp the edges of the foil around the meat or the plate that the meat is resting on because air should be able to circulate under the foil. It does not matter if the shiny side of the foil is up or down.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Tent meat loosely with one sheet of aluminum foil in an upside-down V. Do not crimp the edges as this can trap steam and sog out a crust.

Shades of Onion

What does it mean to cook an onion to soft or golden? How do I know when it's there?
–Bob Wigand, Beltsville, Md.

In recipes we call for onions cooked to a handful of different descriptions: softened, translucent, golden brown, and dark brown.

Sautéing onions causes their cell walls to break down, releasing moisture. It also causes the complex starches within the onion's cells to slowly turn into simple sugars and concurrently release sulfur compounds (which cause the harsh taste in raw onions)—the combined effect leaves sweeter and less pungent onions in the pan. When we direct you to cook onions to a specific stage, we do so based on the flavor and texture we want from the onions in that dish.

We've created a visual guide to help you determine when your onions reach each stage. We tested with 2 cups of sliced onions and 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Follow our visual chart to know when your onions have reached the desired color.

Softened	Translucent	Golden Brown	Dark Brown
2 to 4 minutes Still crunchy, slightly softened.	3 to 5 minutes Softer, raw onion flavor gone.	5 to 7 minutes Slight caramel flavors, sweeter.	20 minutes Very dark, sweet, and rich.

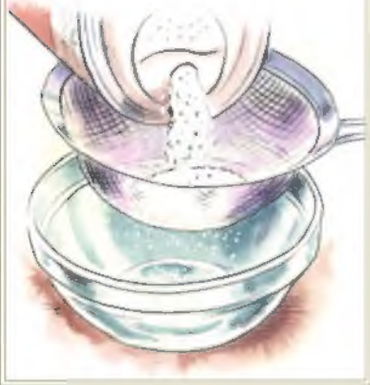
To ask us a cooking question, visit **CooksCountry.com/ask**. Or write to Ask Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

COMPILED BY SCOTT KATHAN

SMART TIP
Thrifty Sifter
Brian O'Rourke, Mercersburg, Pa.

Very coarse salt for garnishes and baked goods (like pretzels) can be hard to find and expensive. So I've taken to passing Diamond Crystal kosher salt through a fine-mesh strainer, sifting out the small flakes, and leaving just the large ones behind. They aren't quite as big as the giant crystals found on a commercial pretzel, but they are a big improvement over table salt or unsifted kosher salt.



COOL TIP
Smoothie Starter
Seth Branin, San José, Calif.

Rather than scrounging bleary-eyed through the kitchen in the morning, I put all my healthy smoothie ingredients—yogurt, berries, seeds, and juice—in the blender jar the night before and then stick the jar in the fridge. Come morning, all I have to do is put the jar on the base and hit "puree" and my breakfast is ready.

SMART TIP
Parmesan Primer
Darlene Daly, Boulder, Colo.

I always toss my just-drained, piping-hot pasta with some freshly grated Parmesan cheese before saucing it. The melted cheese helps the sauce cling to the noodles and boosts the flavor at the same time.

HELPFUL HINT **Butter Float**
Audrey Thompson, Barnesville, Pa.

I was baking cookies recently and the recipe required room-temperature eggs and softened butter. I hadn't planned ahead and my ingredients were still in the refrigerator, so I ran a bowl of warm water to warm the eggs and accidentally put the wrapped stick of butter in the bowl as well. Minutes later I had room-temperature eggs and butter. I have been using this trick ever since. The waxed-paper wrapping keeps the butter dry in the water.

CLEVER TIP
Shake It Up
Lesley Ellis, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Peeling garlic is such a pain. But I've found that if I put two or three garlic cloves in a Mason jar, close it tightly, and shake vigorously for 15 seconds, the papery skins come right off the cloves.

CLEVER COOKING
Rustic Cupcakes
Dorrine Esposito, Hamilton, N.J.

When I was baking cupcakes for my daughter's birthday recently, I discovered that I didn't have enough cupcake papers. I came up with an idea on the spot. I cut parchment paper into 4-inch squares and placed them in the wells. It worked wonderfully and I liked the down-home, rustic look of the parchment paper.

COOL TRICK **Taming Curled Parchment**
Jill March, Otisfield, Maine

I'm always annoyed when parchment paper doesn't lie flat on a baking sheet. I started spraying the baking sheet with vegetable oil spray first and then cutting the right-size piece of parchment and laying it in the sprayed baking sheet. All the edges stay down and don't keep rolling up.

Submit a tip online at **CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts** or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

Monroe County Pork Steaks

Paper-thin pork "steaks" cooked on the grill? Sounds like a recipe for shoe leather. But a trip to Monroe County, Kentucky, showed us the light. BY ASHLEY MOORE

WHEN OUR EXECUTIVE food editor, Bryan Roof, recently arrived home from a visit to Monroe County in southern Kentucky, all he could talk about was the grilled pork "steaks" he'd found there. Spicy, tender, smoky, intoxicating—when anyone waxes so enthusiastically about a dish, I know it's worth learning more about.

The cooks Roof met in Kentucky begin by slicing frozen pork butt into thin steaks. The steaks are generously seasoned with salt and pepper and then grilled and smoked over hickory wood for a few minutes—or in some cases longer. The pork steaks get sopped continually with a fiery, crimson-colored sauce of distilled vinegar, black and red peppers, and plenty of lard, butter, or both. If you like it hot (as in, you like your lips numb), then you order your pork "dipped," which means the meat is either drizzled with or dunked in the sauce (see "On the Road").

I'm handy with a knife, but there's no way to slice such thin steaks from a bone-in pork butt without industrial equipment, so I hit the meat counter to find a reasonable replacement. After experiments with pork rib chops and boneless loin chops, I found that thin bone-in pork blade chops made the best substitution because they contain a good amount of shoulder muscle along with fat. Another plus to using blade chops was that they are sold precut—no significant home butchery required.

Because the steaks are cut from the forgiving shoulder, they can stay on the fire for 20 minutes or longer without turning tough. The blade chops I was working with, though, needed less time on the grill. A side-by-side (by side) test of chops cooked over a medium fire, a cooler fire, and a hot fire revealed that chops cooked over a hot fire for 3 to 5 minutes per side had the best color and were the most tender.

But the chops were curling up at the edges. I wanted flat steaks, not peaks and valleys. The remedy was easy: I cut two slits in the fat surrounding the loin portion of each chop. This quick fix kept the meat from curling and allowed the chops to hold their shape.

Now about that crazy-hot hot sauce. It needed a few slight tweaks. I didn't want it to be so spicy that it required a warning sign, so I decided to slightly dial back on the cayenne and black pepper amounts. I melted butter, cooking it until it was golden brown to bring out its nutty flavor, and then added the black and cayenne peppers, paprika (for color), and white vinegar. I brought the mixture to a simmer and then took it off the heat. I poured the sauce over the quick-cooking chops when they came off the grill. Tasters ranging from spice fanatics to those with tamer palates all loved this sauce.

Our take on this fiery sauce is made with browned butter, vinegar, cayenne, and plenty of black pepper.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **Snip the Fat**

We use blade chops here because they're very flavorful and are often sold cut thin. They do, however, require a little prep. Using kitchen shears, snip the interior portion of fat surrounding the loin muscle of each chop in two places, about 2 inches apart, to prevent the chops from buckling (and thus cooking unevenly) when they hit the heat of the grill.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

On the Road
All About That Dip

Fans of Collins Bar-B-Q swear by the screaming hot "dip" served with thin pork steaks.

Barbecue in Monroe County, Kentucky, is known (or rather not known) for being a little different. Take the 'cue found at Collins Bar-B-Q in Gamaliel. There, you won't find the slow-smoked fall-apart-tender hunk of pork prevalent at most Southern barbecue joints. Instead, you'll find slices of bone-in pork shoulder, cut thin on the butcher's band saw and quickly grilled over hickory coals.

The sauce, which doubles as the basting liquid, is atypical, too. Known locally as "dip"—basting or saucing is thus "dipping"—it's more spicy than traditional barbecue sauce. Made with lard, butter, vinegar, and black and cayenne peppers, it's thin, oily, and potent. It comes together in a tall pot that's left to sit on the back of the stove where the oily portion naturally rises to the top and the vinegary spice-laden part sinks to the bottom. Since much of the capsaicin in the peppers is oil-soluble, that's where most of the heat resides. If you like your shoulder spicy, the pit master will dip from the top of the pot; less spicy and he dives the ladle to the bottom where it collects more of the spent pepper and sharp vinegar. It's as much about the dip as it is the pork. The shoulder is mopped with dip on the grill, smothered with dip on your plate, and then served with more dip on the side for dunking. And while this is essentially a bone-in pork chop, this is 100 percent finger food. Tear off a piece, dip, eat, repeat.–BRYAN ROOF

Kentucky White Beans and Vinegar Slaw

These flavorful sides make a meal out of pork steaks.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

MONROE COUNTY–STYLE PORK CHOPS Serves 4

Thin pork chops buckle during cooking. To prevent this, we snip the fat surrounding the loin portion of each chop. In Monroe County, these chops are considered finger food.

- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons pepper
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- ¾ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 8 (6-ounce) bone-in blade-cut pork chops, ½ inch thick, trimmed
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup distilled white vinegar

1. Combine salt, pepper, paprika, and cayenne in bowl. Transfer 2 tablespoons spice mixture to separate bowl and stir in cornstarch. Using kitchen shears, snip interior portion of fat surrounding loin muscle of each chop in 2 places, about 2 inches apart. Season chops all over with cornstarch mixture. Reserve remaining spice mixture for sauce.

2. Heat butter in small saucepan over medium-low heat. Cook, swirling pan constantly, until butter turns dark golden brown and has nutty aroma, 4 to 5 minutes. Add reserved spice mixture and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Carefully add vinegar (mixture will bubble up), bring to quick simmer, then remove from heat. Let cool completely, but do not let butter solidify.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on high.

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place chops on grill and cook without moving them (covered if using gas) until well charred on first side, 3 to 5 minutes. Flip chops and continue to cook on second side until well charred and meat registers 140 degrees, 3 to 5 minutes longer.

5. Transfer chops to rimmed baking sheet. Pour sauce over chops, flipping to evenly coat. Tent with aluminum foil and let rest for 5 minutes, flipping chops halfway through resting. Serve.

KENTUCKY-STYLE WHITE BEANS

Serves 4 to 6

We prefer the flavor and texture of Goya canned cannellini beans. Use the meat from the ham hock within a few days to flavor another dish. Our favorite brand of liquid smoke is Wright's.

- 1 (8-ounce) ham steak, rind removed
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed
- 5 cups water
- 1 (12-ounce) smoked ham hock
- ¼ teaspoon liquid smoke
- Salt and pepper

1. Using 2 forks, shred ham steak into 1-inch pieces; set aside. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until softened and beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Add beans, water, ham hock, liquid smoke, and ham steak pieces to pot and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until beans are very tender and mixture is thickened slightly, about 35 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3. Remove ham hock. Season beans with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

KENTUCKY-STYLE VINEGAR SLAW Serves 4

Shred the carrot on the large holes of a box grater.

- 1 (14-ounce) bag shredded green and red coleslaw mix
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 1 carrot, peeled and shredded
- 1 cup distilled white vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Salt and pepper

1. Combine coleslaw mix, onion, and carrot in large bowl. Bring vinegar, sugar, oil, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper to simmer in small saucepan over medium heat, stirring to dissolve sugar. Once simmering, pour hot vinegar mixture over coleslaw mixture and toss to combine.

2. Refrigerate until fully chilled and coleslaw mix is wilted, about 2 hours. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, using slotted spoon.

Photos: Charlotte Wilder

Fried Pizza

Fried pizza sounds like novelty food. But when it's properly done, this centuries-old tradition produces a pie that is crisp, chewy, and far from greasy. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

FRIED PIZZA, ALSO called *pizza montanara* or *pizza fritta*, has become something of a sensation in New York pizzerias over the past several years. But, not unexpectedly, this pizza's roots run deeper, all the way back to Italy. In the rural, mountainous areas outside Naples, home cooks who lacked ovens have been frying pizza for centuries. This tradition traveled with Italians as they came to the New World and has been passed down through generations.

When word spread through the test kitchen that I was making fried pizza, several staff members shared childhood memories of their grandmothers' New York or New Jersey kitchens. They described a puffed, golden-brown crust with a crisp, chewy texture. And despite being deep-fried, the crust wasn't greasy. This was something I'd have to see to believe.

I hit the books, where I found interesting stories about the dish itself but few instructions on how to make it. One thing I knew for sure: If I was going to fry the crust, I wanted the rest of the pizza to come together easily. With that in mind, I blitzed a few batches of our no-cook pizza sauce in the food processor, shredded some fresh mozzarella, tore a bunch of basil leaves, and grabbed some store-bought pizza dough.

While traditional pizza montanara is deep-fried (most restaurants that serve it have dedicated deep-fry equipment), I was hoping to obtain the same results—a puffed texture and crisp crust—using a shallower pool of oil. I heated ½ inch of vegetable oil (about ½ quart) to 350 degrees in a high-sided Dutch oven (our favorite pan to fry in because its high sides contain splatter). In the meantime, I divided a pound of room-temperature pizza dough into two 8-ounce balls and began working them into 10-inch rounds on a floured counter.

Once the oil reached 350 degrees—hot enough to ensure the crust cooked up crisp, not greasy—I carefully added one dough round. It began to puff immediately, and I had to press down on it with a spider skimmer to keep it submerged. Unfortunately, the oil didn't cover enough of the dough, so the middle stayed raw. I increased the oil depth until I was able to fully submerge the dough and found that 6 cups, which yielded a depth of about 1¼ inches, was sufficient (and 2 cups less oil than we usually use for deep frying). About 90 seconds per side gave me a golden-brown crust with a nice chew.

The crust is deep-fried (and then broiled), but it won't be greasy if you fry it at the correct temperature.

I spread ½ cup of my quick pizza sauce on each fried crust and scattered fresh mozzarella on top. Some recipes call for finishing the pizzas in the oven on a preheated pizza stone or in a cast-iron skillet to melt the cheese and heat the sauce, but both of those options meant I could finish only one pizza at a time, and I wanted two. I had better luck with a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet. Elevating the pies this way had the added benefit of allowing hot air to circulate underneath, ensuring that the bottoms of the pies stayed nice and crisp. Broiling the pizzas for about 5 minutes provided faster browning than baking, and warming the sauce first helped protect against sogginess.

If crowd reaction counts for anything, I had a hit on my hands. My sudden popularity among my colleagues made it clear, however, that two pizzas would not suffice for this recipe, so I tweaked my sauce and added a second ball of dough. I found that I could fry all four crusts in quick succession and then assemble the second two pies while the first two were broiling. No wonder my colleagues spoke so fondly of the pizza fritta from their childhoods.

FRIED PIZZA MONTANARA

Serves 4 to 6

Room-temperature dough is much easier to shape than cold dough, so pull the dough from the fridge about 1 hour before you plan to start cooking. Shred the mozzarella on the large holes of a box grater.

SAUCE

- **1 (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes, drained**
- **1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 teaspoon red wine vinegar**
- **1 teaspoon dried oregano**
- **1 teaspoon salt**
- **¼ teaspoon pepper**

PIZZA

- **2 (1-pound) balls pizza dough, room temperature**
- **6 cups vegetable or peanut oil**
- **1 ounce Pecorino Romano cheese, grated (½ cup)**
- **8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, shredded (2 cups)**
- **¼ cup fresh basil leaves, torn**
- **Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling**

1. FOR THE SAUCE: Process all ingredients in food processor until smooth, about 30 seconds. Transfer to small saucepan; cover and set over low heat to warm (sauce needn't be cooked, just warmed).

2. FOR THE PIZZA: Place 2 wire racks in 2 rimmed baking sheets. Cut four 12-inch squares of parchment paper.

3. Divide each dough ball into two 8-ounce balls and cover with greased plastic wrap. Press and roll 1 dough ball into 10-inch circle on lightly floured counter. Transfer to floured parchment square, dust top of dough round with flour, and set aside on counter. Press and roll second dough ball into 10-inch circle, transfer to floured parchment square, and stack on top of first dough round. Repeat with remaining 2 dough balls, creating second stack. Lightly cover dough round stacks with clean dish towel.

4. Add vegetable oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 1¼ inches deep and heat over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. Gently lower 1 dough round into oil, keeping it as flat as possible as it enters oil. Fry first side, carefully pressing down with spider or slotted metal spatula to keep submerged, until puffed and golden brown, 1½ to 2 minutes. Adjust burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature between 325 and 350 degrees.

5. Using tongs, carefully flip dough round and continue to fry until second side is golden brown, 1½ to 2 minutes longer. Transfer to prepared wire rack. Repeat with remaining dough rounds. (You should have 2 fried crusts on each rack; crusts may extend slightly beyond edges of racks.)

6. Adjust oven rack 10 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Spread ½ cup warm sauce over each crust, leaving 1-inch border. Sprinkle each crust with 2 tablespoons Pecorino, followed by ½ cup mozzarella. Broil 1 sheet of pizza until cheese melts and crusts begin to brown in spots, 4 to 6 minutes. Repeat with second sheet. Transfer pizzas to cutting board; sprinkle each with basil and drizzle with olive oil. Slice and serve.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **How to Make Fried Pizza**

1. SHAPE Divide each dough ball in half. Roll each half into an even 10-inch round.

2. STACK This recipe makes four pizzas; stack the dough rounds on parchment.

3. FRY Place each dough round in the hot oil, pressing down to keep it submerged.

4. TOP AND BROIL Ladle on our easy sauce, add cheese, and broil two pizzas at a time.

TESTING SPLATTER SCREENS

KEY **Good** ★★★ **Fair** ★★ **Poor** ★

Splatter screens promise to help contain grease during stovetop cooking. Our current winning model, from Amco Houseworks, blocks larger, potentially painful (and messy) flying drops of oil but still lets through a fine mist. Could we find a better option?

We assembled seven models, priced from $7 to $21.55. We used them while searing chicken thighs and browning bacon, ranking each on how easy it was to use, how well it contained splatter, how it affected the food, and how it cleaned up. We tried the screens on small, medium, and large skillets and saucepans, as well as Dutch ovens.

Models made from silicone and perforated metal blocked our view of the food, making it difficult to monitor. The silicone models were too dense, too; they blocked oil but trapped steam, so when we lifted them, condensation dripped back into the oil, causing major splatters. And because the steam couldn't escape, the food browned more slowly.

The catch-22 of splatter screens is this: Steam and oil rise off the pan together, so no splatter screen can contain all the oil but still release the steam. Nothing worked perfectly, but fine mesh worked best, allowing steam to escape and letting us see the food.

Fit was the defining factor, and our best model was our old favorite, the Amco Houseworks Splatter Screen ($19.51). It released steam and tidied up easily, and while it won't keep your kitchen splatter-free, it will help. Read the full testing story and results chart at **CooksCountry.com/sept15**.

–HANNAH CROWLEY

RECOMMENDED	CRITERIA		TESTERS' NOTES
AMCO Houseworks Splatter Screen **Model:** 881 **Price:** $19.51 **Diameter:** 13 in **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Splatter Containment** **Cooking Results** **Cleanup**	★★★ ★★½ ★★★ ★★★	No splatter screen was perfect, but this one did the best job of containing grease, blocking larger, dangerous oil blobs. It laid flat atop every pan we tried it on and didn't need constant adjusting to stay flush with the rim. Also, we could see through its fine-mesh face to monitor the food, and it didn't change cooking times or prohibit browning.
RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS			
PROGRESSIVE Prepworks Splatter Screen **Model:** GT-7113 **Price:** $11.67 **Diameter:** 13 in **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Splatter Containment** **Cooking Results** **Cleanup**	★★½ ★★ ★★★ ★★★	This fine-mesh screen blocked larger oil splatters but still let through a fine mist. Its metal feet and handle meant we had to fiddle to get it to lay flush atop pans, and when it didn't, more oil escaped. But we liked that we could see through the fine mesh to monitor the food, and it allowed steam to escape freely.
NOT RECOMMENDED			
NORPRO Grip-EZ Silicone Splatter Screen **Model:** 2061 **Price:** $17 **Diameter:** 13 in **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Splatter Containment** **Cooking Results** **Cleanup**	★½ ★ ★ ★★★	This guard's thick, perforated silicone face trapped moisture inside the pan, altering cooking time. Condensation underneath the splatter guard ran off into the pan, and together the water and oil exploded in a splatter. It also blocked our view of the food.
NORPRO Nonstick Splatter Guard **Model:** 2063 **Price:** $7 **Diameter:** Three 9 by 10-in panels **Dishwasher-Safe:** No	**Ease of Use** **Splatter Containment** **Cooking Results** **Cleanup**	★ ½ ★★★ ★★	This guard was made up of three connected metal rectangles that stood around the pan vertically to block splatters. Food was fine, because the guard didn't cover the top of the pan, but oil flew over its 9-inch walls. And one side was always left unprotected. Worse still, it blocked the three surrounding burners from use.

KEY INGREDIENT

Fresh Mozzarella

It's important to use fresh mozzarella—and not block mozzarella—in this recipe. The fresh cheese, sometimes sold in water or wrapped in plastic, has a distinct texture that holds its shredded shape and won't melt into a puddle. Pat the cheese dry and shred it on the large holes of a box grater, but use a gentle hand and work with the cheese when it is cold.

FRESH MOZZ IS A MUST
Don't use block cheese here.

Ranch Fried Chicken

Hot oil is the key to crunchy fried chicken, but it's deadly to fresh herbs. Or is it? BY KATIE LEAIRD

SAVORY, CRUNCHY CRUST and irresistibly juicy meat make fried chicken one of our favorite foods in the test kitchen. For a summery twist, I set out to make fried chicken with all its beloved attributes, plus the aroma and flavor of bright, lively fresh herbs.

First, I had to pick a flavor lane. The woody herbs traditionally paired with poultry—rosemary, thyme, and sage—reminded me of winter. But chive, dill, and cilantro recalled a summery American flavor: ranch. Buttermilk, already one of fried chicken's best friends, would provide ranch's signature tang.

To start, I brined my chicken pieces, as we usually do in the test kitchen, and then dipped them in buttermilk and a few different herbed coatings (flour, cornstarch, bread crumbs, and combinations thereof) and used our tried-and-true frying methods. But batch after batch tasted more or less the same—fried. The herbs were undetectable in the final product.

I tried treating the chicken to a bath in an herby marinade. I tried rubbing dried spices directly on the chicken before coating it with flour. I even infused the frying oil with herbs. But still I had only faintly green chicken to prove that I had used any fresh herbs at all.

Why were the herb flavors disappearing? Our science editor explained that the flavor compounds in herbs become unstable and volatile when exposed to heat. Some compounds start to chemically break down while others simply evaporate at hot temperatures. The breading helped protect the herbs from the heat but for only a short time.

Aha: So the issue wasn't how I introduced the herbs to the chicken, but rather how long I let them stay in the hot oil. With this knowledge, I tried precooking the chicken, poaching it before coating it with the herbs. Less than a minute in the hot oil and this chicken was crispy. And, at last, I could taste the herbs. But I lost the juicy decadence. And who wants to cook chicken twice?

Another look at the cut of chicken I was using revealed a loophole. If I used smaller boneless thighs instead of thicker bone-in parts, I could reduce the frying time by half. And with the increased surface area on boneless, skinless thighs, I could increase the amount of herby coating per piece. What's more, thigh meat is naturally juicier than breast meat so I could forgo the standard brining step and shave off an hour of prep time. Plus, chicken thighs are cheaper.

Flavorful, juicy boneless thighs are thin enough to fry quickly.

After a few tests, I'd settled on a three-part technique for the chives, dill, and cilantro. I whisked them into buttermilk along with the other ranch components (vinegar, garlic, salt and pepper, and mayonnaise) to make an herby liquid coating. I mixed the herbs into the flour coating along with some cornstarch for extra crunch. And I used the herbs in a ranch-style dipping sauce.

The final analysis? Not one, but two American classics found a place at my summer table. And with boneless pieces, I can fork-and-knife them if I'm feeling fancy or just grab and gobble by hand.

KEY INGREDIENTS

Three Herbs, Three Ways

We use the defining herbs of ranch flavor—chives, cilantro, and dill—in three ways for this chicken: in the buttermilk dip, in the flour coating, and in the serving sauce.

RANCH FLAVORS
Chives, cilantro, and dill.

RANCH FRIED CHICKEN Serves 4 to 6

Use a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more for this recipe.

CHICKEN

- 8 (5- to 7-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 2 quarts peanut or vegetable oil

BUTTERMILK MIXTURE

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh dill
- 2 teaspoons distilled white vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Pinch cayenne pepper

COATING

- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup cornstarch
- 3 tablespoons minced fresh chives
- 3 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh dill
- 1½ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¾ teaspoon pepper

RANCH SAUCE

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- Salt and pepper

1. FOR THE CHICKEN: Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

2. FOR THE BUTTERMILK MIXTURE: Whisk all ingredients together in bowl. Set aside ¼ cup buttermilk mixture for ranch sauce.

3. FOR THE COATING: Whisk all ingredients together in large bowl.

4. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Set second wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet and line half of rack with triple layer of paper towels.

5. Working with 1 piece at a time, dip chicken in remaining buttermilk mixture to coat, letting excess drip back into bowl; then dredge in coating, pressing to adhere. Transfer chicken to first wire rack (without paper towels). (At this point, coated chicken may be refrigerated, uncovered, for up to 2 hours.)

6. Heat oil in large Dutch oven over medium-high heat until it reaches 350 degrees. Add half of chicken to hot oil and fry until golden brown and registers 175 degrees, 7 to 9 minutes. Adjust

The American Table
Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch

Talk about an unlikely origin story. The last thing that anyone expected Kenneth Henson of Thayer, Nebraska, to do during his three-year stint as a plumbing contractor in Alaska just after World War II was to develop a salad dressing recipe that would become one of America's most popular condiments.

A plumbing contractor? In Alaska? You heard it right. Henson, 29 years old when he decamped for the then-U.S. territory, was a good cook, charged with preparing meals for his work-camp colleagues. A relentless kitchen tinkerer, he developed a buttermilk-based salad dressing that his crew loved.

In the early 1950s, Henson, who eventually changed his first name to Steve, relocated to the hills outside Santa Barbara, where he and his wife bought a 120-acre parcel and opened up a dude ranch, which they called "Hidden Valley." Henson's salad dressing was a fan favorite at meal time, eventually the Hensons began sending guests home with souvenir "ranch" seasoning packets.

Henson sold the "Hidden Valley Ranch" brand to Clorox for $8 million in 1972 and closed the ranch shortly thereafter. A shelf-stable version of the dressing was created in 1983; today, ranch is the most popular salad dressing flavor in the United States.

burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature between 325 and 350 degrees.

7. Transfer chicken to paper towel–lined side of second wire rack to drain on each side for 30 seconds, then move to unlined side of rack. Return oil to 350 degrees and repeat with remaining chicken.

8. FOR THE RANCH SAUCE Whisk mayonnaise into reserved buttermilk mixture. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

9. Transfer chicken to platter and serve with ranch sauce.

Sweet Potato Cornbread

Adding sweet potatoes to crumbly cornbread isn't a new idea, but it sure is a good one. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

SWEET POTATO CORNBREAD marries two Southern staples—sweet potatoes and cornbread—to take the latter into a colorful, flavorful new direction. But introducing cooked sweet potatoes to cornbread affects the bread's texture and not always in a good way. I wanted sweet potato flavor and no soggy mess.

After experiments with a handful of recipes, I learned that precooking the sweet potato is a must. My test recipes varied in their precooking methods (boiling, roasting, microwaving), but I found that drier methods of cooking made it easier to control the added moisture in the cornbread. Microwaving won out for ease and efficiency. After poking each potato to allow steam to escape (I was using 1½ pounds of potatoes to start), I zapped them for about 15 minutes, flipping them every 5 minutes for even cooking. I let them cool a bit before scooping the softened flesh from the skins.

After several tests with different ratios of cornmeal and flour, I landed on 1½ cups cornmeal to just ½ cup flour for a light yet sturdy bread.

Tasters preferred samples made with whole milk to those with buttermilk. They also shied away from warm spices like cinnamon and nutmeg. And just ¼ cup of brown sugar helped the bread develop deeper color and enhanced the delicate sweet potato flavor.

Cast iron cornbread is great, but I found that an ovensafe nonstick skillet was a low fuss replacement. I melted a tablespoon of butter in the skillet until the foaming subsided (nonstick or not, fat is essential for crisp brown edges), poured in the batter, and transferred the operation to a 425 degree oven for 30 minutes. I let the cornbread cool in the pan for about an hour before sliding it from the skillet. At once crumbly and cohesive, savory and sweet, this sweet potato version—with a browned crust and brilliant orange-gold interior—was in a league of its own.

Microwaving the sweet potatoes saves time and is much easier than roasting them.

SWEET POTATO CORNBREAD

Serves 10 to 12

You can make this cornbread in a 10-inch cast-iron skillet or in an ovensafe nonstick skillet. Light or dark brown sugar works equally well in this recipe. Note that the cornbread needs to cool for 1 hour before being removed from the pan.

- 1½ pounds sweet potatoes, unpeeled
- ½ cup whole milk
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 4 large eggs
- 1½ cups (7½ ounces) yellow cornmeal
- ½ cup (2½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup packed (1¾ ounces) brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1¾ teaspoons salt

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Prick potatoes all over with fork. Microwave on large plate until potatoes are very soft and surfaces are slightly wet, 10 to 15 minutes, flipping every 5 minutes. Immediately slice potatoes in half to release steam.

2. When potatoes are cool enough to handle, scoop flesh into bowl and mash until smooth (you should have about 1¾ cups); discard skins. Whisk in milk, melted butter, and eggs. Whisk cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in separate large bowl. Stir sweet potato mixture into cornmeal mixture until combined.

3. Melt remaining 1 tablespoon butter in 10-inch ovensafe nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until bubbling, about 3 minutes. Swirl butter to coat bottom and sides. Pour batter into hot skillet and smooth top with rubber spatula. Bake until cornbread is golden brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cornbread cool in skillet on wire rack for 1 hour. Loosen edges of cornbread from skillet with spatula and slide out onto cutting board. Cut into wedges and serve.

Grilled Sugar Steak

The sugar adds a hint of sweetness and helps create the ultimate charred crust.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

STEAK GRILLED WITH a sugar crust? Really? Really. At Bastien's, a historic family-owned restaurant in Denver, Colorado, grilled sugar steak has been the signature dish and a customer favorite for decades. Their strip steak is a juicy medium rare on the inside (a warning on the menu disclaims any steak cooked further) and delicately crusty on the outside, delivering a fleeting moment of sweetness followed by a flood of meaty flavors. I set out to create an equally captivating version in the test kitchen.

Though famous for it, Bastien's doesn't have a lock on sugar steak: A little research turned up recipes from New Orleans, Kansas City, and California. Most called for rubbing the steaks with a combination of sugar and salt. Some used brown sugar, which we quickly discounted because of its strong molasses flavor. Others called for so much sugar that the steaks did nothing but burn and turn bitter. Some introduced ingredients like bourbon or cayenne pepper to the mix, but these additions muddied the waters. I wanted a clean, faintly sweet steak with a delicate crust. To get it, I'd need to find the right amount of sugar for sweetness, and just enough salt for seasoning. After cooking through five recipes and compiling notes from my tasters, a 2:1 ratio of sugar to salt seemed like a good starting point.

My first problem revealed itself straight out of the gate: When I applied the sugar-salt mixture to the steaks (strips, just like Bastien's uses), it mostly just slid off the meat when it hit the grill. Whatever coating managed to stick melted off as it heated, leaving no trace of crust or flavor. This never happens with just salt; was the sugar creating an unexpected moisture problem?

Observing the coated steaks more closely, I saw that they started to moisten within a few minutes of being rubbed. The salt in the mixture pulled moisture out of the meat, which dissolved the sugar, creating a thin syrup. Not good. Moist steaks wouldn't give me the crust I wanted because once they were on the grill, the moisture would create steam, discouraging browning. (Patting them dry, our normal fix for too much moisture, would have removed the coating.)

I thought that maybe instead of fighting this natural process, I could put it to work in my favor. To find out, I sprinkled the sugar-salt mixture onto my steaks and let them rest at room temperature for an hour. I removed them from the dish, applied more of the mixture, and found that, to my delight, the moisture on the steaks' surfaces allowed it to stick beautifully.

I reconsidered my 2:1 ratio of granulated sugar to salt. I hoped to forestall any burnt bitter flavors by switching to a 1:1 ratio, but then I couldn't detect sweetness at all. Adjusting the ratio to 4 parts sugar to 3 parts salt created the delicate crust and clean sweetness I wanted without any bitterness.

One last detail needed smoothing out: heat. When I cooked steaks over a fire that was too cool, I never got a crust. Too hot, and the steaks just burned. I wanted char on the outside and juiciness on the inside.

To get it, I rotated the steaks once they started to caramelize and also swapped their positions over the coals (depending on how quickly some were coloring). We rarely suggest fussing with your steaks on the grill in this way, but keeping them moving helped me minimize the hot spots and even out the heavy browning caused by the sugar. Sweet success.

The key to sugar steak's crust is deep browning without burning, which means the cook has to pay attention and move the steaks around the grill.

On the Road
A Denver Gem

Shaped like a circus tent, Bastien's Restaurant sits prominently on Colfax Avenue a 50-odd-mile street that bisects Denver It's a notorious street of contrasts (one stretch abuts the state capital while the next teems with unlawful trade, and gentrification mixes with grit along its entire stretch), but as Denver's defining throughway, it was granted Heritage Corridor status in the late 1990s to help protect and preserve Bastien's and many other midcentury architectural gems

GRILLED SUGAR STEAK

Serves 4 to 6

Plan ahead: These steaks need to sit for at least 1 hour after seasoning. You will have about 1 teaspoon of sugar mixture left over after the final seasoning of the steaks in step 3. If your steaks are more than 1 inch thick, pound them to 1 inch

- ¼ cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons kosher salt
- 4 (9- to 11-ounce) boneless strip steaks, 1 inch thick, trimmed
- Pepper

1. Mix sugar and salt together in bowl. Pat steaks dry with paper towels and place in 13 by 9 inch baking dish. Evenly sprinkle 1½ teaspoons sugar mixture on top of each steak. Flip steaks and sprinkle second side of each steak with 1½ teaspoons sugar mixture. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour or refrigerate for up to 24 hours.

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium high.

3. Clean and oil cooking grate. Transfer steaks to plate. (Steaks will be wet; do not pat dry.) Sprinkle steaks with 1 teaspoon sugar mixture on each side, then season with pepper.

4. Place steaks on hotter side of grill (if using charcoal) and cook (covered if using gas) until evenly charred on first side, 3 to 5 minutes, rotating and switching positions for even cooking Flip steaks and continue to cook until meat registers 120 to 125 degrees (for medium rare), 3 to 5 minutes, rotating and switching positions for even cooking.

5. Transfer steaks to wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet and let rest for 5 minutes Slice and serve

KEYS TO The Best Sugar Steaks

To get the right mix of sweet and savory, follow these steps.

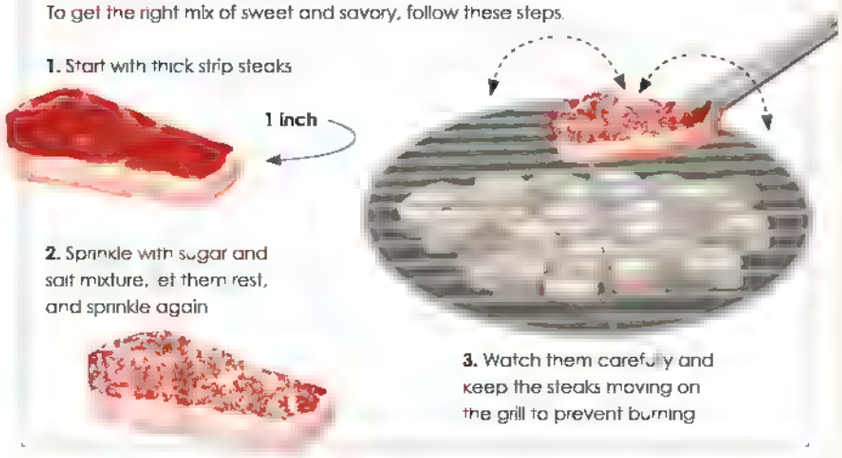

1. Start with thick strip steaks
1 inch
2. Sprinkle with sugar and salt mixture, let them rest, and sprinkle again
3. Watch them carefully and keep the steaks moving on the grill to prevent burning

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece Photo: Thomas H. Simmons

Broiled Tomatoes

Cooking juicy summer tomatoes seemed fruitless, but this old-school technique pays off.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

AS ANYONE WHO'S ever had one knows, nothing beats a plump, juicy, fresh-off-the-vine tomato, sprinkled with salt and devoured in the heat of high summer. Why, then, have Americans been messing with perfection for so many years, gilding those fruits with a crusty topping and sliding them into the oven?

I looked for answers in a collection of vintage and modern broiled tomato recipes. Most followed a pretty basic formula. Top tomato halves with something creamy or crunchy and broil. I didn't fall in love, but I started to see the promise in a soft, warm tomato with a topping that amplified and complemented its complex flavors.

Improvising, I topped a few supermarket tomato halves with a basic mix of dried bread crumbs, basil, garlic, olive oil, and a bit of sugar for balance. I broiled them until the crumbs were just golden brown (about 4 minutes). But the tomato halves were only partly cooked through.

Switching to smaller vine-ripened tomatoes helped. And rather than using halves, I tried slicing each tomato into three thick slices. This gave me a more consistently cooked tomato—soft and warm and summery—and the added bonus of more crunchy topping per bite. Plus, since vine-ripened tomatoes are available year round, I knew I'd be able to make this summery dish any time.

With my basic ingredients and techniques settled, I looked for ways to punch up the vibrancy in the topping. I added parsley for freshness. I also mixed in some capers and Parmesan cheese for savory depth.

Thick slices of vine-ripened tomatoes warm through but don't get mushy.

BROILED TOMATOES

Serves 4 to 6

Look for tomatoes that are 2½ to 3 inches in diameter

- 4 vine-ripened tomatoes (6 to 8 ounces each), cored
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- Salt and pepper
- 1 slice hearty white sandwich bread, torn into 1-inch pieces
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and patted dry
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 garlic clove, minced

1. Remove and discard thin slice from tops and bottoms of tomatoes (so rounds will sit flat). Slice tomatoes crosswise into thirds to create ½- to ¾-inch thick rounds. Combine sugar, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Season both sides of tomato slices with sugar mixture. Place tomatoes on wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet.

2. Pulse bread, Parmesan, basil, parsley, capers, oil, garlic, ½ teaspoon pepper, and ⅛ teaspoon salt in food processor until coarsely ground, about 10 pulses.

3. Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Divide bread crumb mixture evenly among tops of tomato slices (about 1 tablespoon each) and press gently to adhere. Broil until crumbs are golden brown and crispy, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer tomatoes to platter. Serve, drizzled with extra oil.

Cedar-Planked Salmon

Why bother cooking salmon on wooden planks? Preventing sticking is just one reason. There's also flavor. BY MORGAN BOLLING

TO THOSE WHO have never tried it, grilling salmon on a cedar plank may seem unnecessarily showy. That's what we used to think, too. But in recent years the test kitchen has experimented with this technique, and we've found that it just may be the best way to grill salmon. Soft fish, big flavor, easy cleanup. A stellar midsummer supper.

The planks aren't showy; they're practical. Because of salmon's delicate flesh, it can easily stick to the grill or, worse, fall through the grate. But inserting a wooden plank between the fish and the grill grate defuses these dangers because, wait for it, the fish never actually touches the grill

What's more, the subtle smoky flavor that cedar smoke contributes—woodsy, earthy, outdoorsy, summery—is just plain fantastic (see "Made for Each Other"). And the rustic presentation is a knockout at the table

Untreated cedar planks for cooking used to be an expensive specialty item that was difficult to procure in many parts of the country, but today you can find planks in supermarkets, hardware stores, and big box stores coast to coast (look near the charcoal and other grilling supplies). I picked up a dozen packages of planks, ordered in 20 pounds of salmon, poured myself a big cup of coffee, and sat down in our cookbook library to pore over recipes for cedar planked salmon.

The recipes I found called for all sorts of cures, sauces, marinades, and rubs for the fish and a multitude of different set ups for the grill. And while all called for me to soak the planks for an hour or so before cooking to help forestall any flare ups over the fire, they otherwise treated the planks very differently. Some called for preheating the plank before laying the fish fillets on it. One even required you to place the plank directly on the hot coals to jump start its smoking process, a daunting option that took just one flame filled test for me to eliminate. (Thankfully I had my fire extinguisher nearby when I took this one for a spin.)

After a few hours at the grill, I concluded that while some of these recipes showed promise, there was one common shortcoming: The cedar, so rich and rewarding as an aroma during the cooking process, was barely discernible once the salmon reached the plate. I didn't want a piece of fish that tasted like a campfire, but I did want to get some character out of the planks I'd picked up.

This smoky, succulent salmon is surprisingly easy to make

I decided to tone down my approach on the front end, skipping the elaborate rubs and marinades I found in my initial research and instead taking a quieter approach with a simple mixture of brown sugar, salt, and dill rubbed onto four ½ pound skin on fillets (enough to feed four). The salt helped season the fish, while the sugar would add flavor and, I hoped, would help the fillets achieve a nice lightly browned color. I let the seasoned fish rest while I soaked my plank for an hour.

Based on my initial tests, I knew that preheating the soaked plank on the grill before adding the fish was important for a present but balanced cedar flavor, one that complemented, rather than clobbered, the fish. Without this step, it would take 5 minutes before the cedar would even start smoking. Because the fish is done within 12 to 15 minutes, by the time the cedar flavor had sufficiently infused the fish, the fillets would be tragically overcooked and my dinner would go straight to the cat.

Preheating the plank on the grill made a big difference in my next couple

of rounds, but I still wasn't satisfied The fish wasn't taking on quite as much cedar flavor as I wanted.

I tried covering the salmon and plank with an inverted disposable aluminum pan to help trap the smoke. But this took me too far in the other direction; the intense cedar flavor was so strong that the fillets tasted like a moth-proof closet; the delicate salmon flavor didn't stand a chance. I started wondering whether chasing this cedar flavor was just an exercise in futility.

A fellow test cook saw my distress and, after closely inspecting my work, wondered whether the skin on the salmon was inhibiting the development of smoky flavor. I was skeptical. I worried that removing it was removing a thin layer of protection, and I might end up with dried-out salmon, more like smoked or cured fish than a fresh fillet.

But I tried a side-by-side test with skin-on versus skinless fillets. My co-worker was right: Removing the skin had little effect on the moistness of the salmon, while concurrently opening the door for just enough cedar flavor.

To seal the deal, I served my tender, smoky salmon with a classic Greek *tzatziki* sauce of yogurt and cucumber. The acidity of the yogurt and lemon in the sauce balanced the richness of the fish, and the herbs echoed the cure. The cucumber added texture without overwhelming the fish's delicate nature.

Score. After rigorous testing and plenty of trial and error, my tasters were finally satisfied. Rich, deeply seasoned, and full of earthy, woodsy cedar flavor, this salmon was a hit. Even avowed fish haters liked it.

And perhaps the best part of all, especially for cooks who've lived through the misery of cleaning up after grilling fish at home: I spent exactly 0 minutes scouring my pristine grill grates.

CEDAR-PLANKED SALMON

Serves 4

Be sure to buy an untreated cedar plank specifically intended for cooking. To ensure uniform pieces of fish, we prefer to purchase a whole center-cut salmon fillet and cut it into four equal pieces. Note that the seasoned fillets must be refrigerated for at least 1 hour before grilling. When preheating the cedar plank, you will know it's ready when it is just giving off wisps of smoke. It should not ignite. Serve with lemon wedges and our Cucumber-Yogurt Sauce (recipe follows).

- **1 (2-pound) center-cut, skinless salmon fillet, about 1½ inches thick**
- **2 tablespoons packed brown sugar**
- **1½ tablespoons kosher salt**
- **1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill**
- **1 teaspoon pepper**
- **1 (16 by 7-inch) cedar plank**
- **1 teaspoon vegetable oil**
- **Lemon wedges**

1. Cut salmon crosswise into 4 equal fillets. Combine sugar, salt, dill, and pepper in bowl. Pat salmon dry with paper towels. Sprinkle salmon all over with sugar mixture, place on plate, and refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours. One hour before grilling, soak cedar plank in water for 1 hour (or according to manufacturer's directions).

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place. Place cedar plank in center of grill. Cover and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until plank is lightly smoking and crackling (it should not ignite), about 5 minutes.

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Place cedar plank in center of grill. Turn all burners to medium-low, cover, and heat grill until plank is smoking and crackling (it should not ignite), about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on medium-low. Adjust burners as needed to maintain grill temperature between 300 and 325 degrees.

3. Brush skinned side of salmon fillets with oil, then place skinned side down on plank. Cover grill and cook until center of salmon is translucent when checked with tip of paring knife and registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 12 to 15 minutes. Using tongs, transfer plank with salmon to baking sheet, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Serve with lemon wedges.

Back Story
Made for Each Other

Cedar and salmon are a match for the ages.

Using cedar to smoke salmon has been done for centuries by indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest, where both cedar and salmon are abundant. Local cedar trees were relatively easy to cut into planks large enough to anchor whole sides of salmon. The sides were then placed around a fire to smoke. During the yearly salmon runs, local communities would smoke scores of fish to preserve.

The unique flavor produced by the pairing is an added bonus with a scientific basis. Cedar contains high levels of flavor-rich compounds called "sesquiterpenes" (try saying that five times fast) that salmon's natural fats eagerly embrace. As the cedar wood smokes, these flavorful compounds infuse the fish, giving it a deeply satisfying, woodsy flavor.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE How to Soak a Cedar Plank

To keep your cedar plank from catching fire, you must soak it for an hour before grilling. We set the plank in a rimmed baking sheet, cover it with water, and weigh it down with a measuring cup to keep the plank submerged. You can find cedar planks near the charcoal in most grocery, big box, and hardware stores; one plank will easily hold four portions.

PREVENTING FLARE-UPS
A good long soak keeps the flames at bay.

Photo: iStock

CUCUMBER-YOGURT SAUCE **Makes about ¾ cup**

A spoon makes easy work of removing the cucumber seeds. Using Greek yogurt here is key; don't substitute regular plain yogurt, or the sauce will be very watery.

- **½ cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, and seeded**
- **½ cup plain whole-milk Greek yogurt**
- **1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint**
- **1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill**
- **1 small garlic clove, minced**
- **¼ teaspoon pepper**
- **⅛ teaspoon salt**

Shred cucumber on large holes of box grater. Combine yogurt, oil, mint, dill, garlic, pepper, salt, and shredded cucumber in bowl. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, about 20 minutes. Serve.

This bright, fresh sauce (which is sometimes called *tzatziki*) helps balance the richness of the smoky salmon.

Grilled Pork Burgers

Ground pork makes for tender, mild-yet-savory burgers—if you add the right ingredients. BY MATTHEW CARD

Our savory, creamy burger sauce gets its kick from horseradish, fresh garlic, and whole-grain mustard

WHILE PORK USUALLY shines on the grill, there is one glaring exception: pork burgers, which, when cooked carelessly, tend to be tough, dry, and bland. This is because, due to lingering but outdated health concerns, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that ground pork be cooked to 160 degrees, which wrings out the flavor- and texture-enhancing juices (and fat) from the meat, constricting it into a tough, unappetizing hockey puck.

But pork burgers can be, and should be, so much more. Pork has a nuanced, slightly sweet flavor that makes a fine canvas for seasonings, sauces, and add-ins. But to keep it tender, a successful pork burger needs an extra hit of moisture in the mix.

Most existing recipes attempt to do just that by adding a host of flavorful, and typically fatty, ingredients. Bacon tops the list. While I rarely find fault with bacon, I did in this instance: The smoky sweet flavor, even when used judiciously, ran roughshod over the sweet, mild pork flavor—and its fat rendered out during grilling, causing serious flare-ups. Pork patties laden with cheese or butter suffered the same sooty fate.

A handful of recipes that I tested kept their list of ingredients as simple as could be—just ground pork, salt, and pepper—but toyed with the grill's temperature in an attempt to preserve the meat's moisture. High heat, low heat, and combo heat, I tried them all, but each yielded the same sad results: dry, bland burgers.

Looking beyond burgers for inspiration, I shifted my focus toward their closest cousin, meatballs. The most obvious difference between the two (aside from the shape) is how meatballs are typically enriched with a panade of bread mashed to a paste with a liquid, often milk, and sometimes egg. Simple, yes, but a panade works a minor miracle by both adding and trapping moisture (juices and fat), allowing meatballs to be thoroughly cooked without drying out. I whipped up a batch of burgers enhanced with a few spoonfuls of panade and was rewarded with the most moist, "porky" burgers to date.

But the burgers were far from perfect. The texture was dense and the flavor was bland—they were veering into meatloaf territory. In successive batches, I abandoned the egg to loosen things up and made my next panade with just one slice of white sandwich bread (about 1 ounce) mashed with 4 tablespoons of milk (mixed into 1½ pounds of ground pork). This worked much better in terms of texture but did little for the flavor of my burgers. To build deeper flavor, I thought back to a recent test kitchen discovery in which we determined that you can use liquids more flavorful than milk in a panade to good effect. After days of testing various ratios of ingredients, I landed on keeping half the milk (2 tablespoons) for richness but replacing the rest with a combination of two of our favorite meaty flavor enhancers: Worcestershire and soy sauces. A minced shallot, a spoonful of fresh minced thyme, and a hefty full teaspoon of black pepper rounded out the seasonings.

As for grilling the burgers, a full chimney of briquettes spread in an even layer (or medium heat on a gas grill) provided just the right heat. To reach the necessary 150-degree internal temperature without burning their crusts, I found that I needed to flatten the burgers to about ¾ inch thick, or 4 inches in diameter (which perfectly fills out a standard hamburger bun).

Pressing a dimple into the center of each burger ensured that the patties wouldn't bulge and be awkward to eat. To gild the lily, I made up a quick mayonnaise-based burger sauce flavored with horseradish, whole-grain mustard, and garlic.

Sandwiched between toasted buns, these moist and juicy pork burgers can easily go toe-to-toe with the best beef burger. The basic recipe also proved the perfect platform for additional flavorings to match any backyard barbecue menu.

GRILLED PORK BURGERS

Serves 4

We developed this recipe with whole milk, but low-fat will work, too.

- 1 slice hearty white sandwich bread, torn into pieces
- 1 shallot, minced
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 4 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1¼ teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ pounds 80 to 85 percent lean ground pork
- 4 hamburger buns, toasted and buttered
- 1 recipe Horseradish Burger Sauce (optional)

1. Combine bread, shallot, milk, soy sauce, Worcestershire, thyme, pepper, and salt in large bowl. Mash to paste with fork. Using your hands, add pork and mix until well combined.

2. Divide pork mixture into 4 equal balls. Flatten balls into even ¾ inch thick patties, about 4 inches in diameter. Using your fingertips, press centers of patties down until about ½ inch thick, creating slight divot.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium.

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Grill patties (covered if using gas), until browned on first side, 5 to 7 minutes. Flip and continue to grill until burgers register 150 degrees, 5 to 7 minutes longer. Serve burgers on buns with sauce, if using.

GRILLED PARMESAN PORK BURGERS

Add ½ cup grated Parmesan, 1 tablespoon minced fresh sage, 1 teaspoon ground fennel, and ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes to pork mixture in step 1.

GRILLED SOUTHWEST PORK BURGERS

Add 2 tablespoons minced jarred hot pepper rings, 1½ teaspoons chili powder, and ½ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary to pork mixture in step 1.

GRILLED THAI-STYLE PORK BURGERS

Substitute fish sauce for soy sauce. Add 3 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro, 2 teaspoons Sriracha sauce, and 1 teaspoon grated lime zest to pork mixture in step 1.

HORSERADISH BURGER SAUCE

Makes ½ cup

Buy refrigerated prepared horseradish, not the shelf-stable kind, which contains preservatives and additives. Horseradish strength varies, so add it according to your taste.

- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 1–2 tablespoons prepared horseradish
- 1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Pinch sugar
- Salt and pepper
- Hot sauce

Whisk mayonnaise, sour cream, horseradish, mustard, garlic, and sugar together in bowl. Season with salt, pepper, and hot sauce to taste.

Building Better Burgers

PROBLEM: Bulging Burgers

A flat raw patty will mound during cooking, creating a shape more like a baseball than a burger. Rounded burgers can be awkward to serve and eat. We think burgers should be flat, not bulging.

SOLUTION: Make a Divot

Pressing a divot into the center of each patty before cooking ensures that the cooked burgers will be flat.

Fresher Creamed Corn

Who says creamed corn has to be gray or gloppy? We set out to freshen up this classic side dish.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

With creamed corn, the simpler, the better.

Corn and cream should be a fantastic combination, sweet flavors mingling to bring out the best in each other. But many people dread creamed corn because they've had only the canned versions, most of which contain no cream at all—only water, thickeners, sugar, and who-knows-what suspended in a grayish, brownish, gelatinous, gloppy goo. I hoped to rescue what should be a simple, satisfying side dish and return it to its rightful place at the summertime table.

To start, I carefully stripped plump, yellow kernels from a stack of husked corn cobs and simmered the kernels gently in cream seasoned with salt and pepper. I expected to get corn kernels that were tender inside but still faintly crisp on the outside, providing a satisfying little pop with each bite.

But as my corn cooked, I found a glaring problem. When I peeked under the lid of my saucepan, I was distressed to find my mixture looked curdled. How could this be? Cream has so much fat that it rarely curdles, and I hadn't introduced any acid (like lemon or vinegar) that would hasten or encourage curdling. I tried both half-and-half and light cream, and they too curdled (and didn't taste as good as the cream). What was going on here?

I gave a shout to our science editor, who explained that enzymes naturally present in the fresh corn may react with cream to cause curdling. To solve the curdling problem, I would need to deactivate the enzymes by cooking the corn before adding the cream. I simmered nine ears' worth of kernels in water and added cream in at the end and found that the liquid turned into a surprisingly flavorful concentrated corn broth. It didn't curdle, so that was progress, but the dish was too watery. I wanted a thicker dish.

Cooking down the corn liquid to thicken it took too much time; starting with less water resulted in unevenly cooked corn (because all of the kernels weren't evenly submerged). Instead, I blended a portion of the kernels with ¼ cup of cream until smooth and then added the puree back to the rest of the corn in the saucepan, which gave me the perfect texture.

One last detail: Recent experiments in the test kitchen revealed that cooking certain vegetables in salted water can toughen their skins. A side-by-side test showed that cooking the corn in unsalted water and then seasoning later produced noticeably softer kernels. Kick the can, because fresh creamed corn is back.

CREAMED CORN

Serves 4 to 6

This recipe is best made with fresh corn cut from the cob. If making this recipe ahead of time, rewarm it gently over low heat, adjusting the consistency with water as needed.

- 9 ears corn, kernels cut from cobs (6¾ cups)
- 1¼ cups water
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- Salt and pepper

1. Combine corn and water in large saucepan and bring to boil over high heat (bubbles will be noticeable around sides of saucepan). Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until corn is crisp-tender, about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

2. Remove saucepan from heat and transfer 1½ cups corn mixture to blender. Add cream, 1⅛ teaspoons salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and process until smooth, about 1 minute. Stir pureed corn mixture into corn mixture in saucepan. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve. (If your creamed corn looks thin, return it to low heat and cook gently until thickened slightly, about 3 minutes.)

Getting to Know Fermented Foods

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

You might be surprised to learn that familiar items like bread, coffee, beer, and chocolate wouldn't exist without fermentation. This ancient, natural process—which relies on the transformative powers of friendly bacteria—not only helps preserve food but also alters its textures, flavors, and aromas.

1 Miso

UMAMI PASTE

Miso is made by mashing cooked soybeans with salt; grains like rice, barley, or rye; flavorings; and koji, which is rice that has grown a healthy mold that produces a sweet, delicate fragrance. In the United States, you're most likely to find the mild, sweet white *shiromiso* (pictured); intense red *aka*; and pungent, dark-colored *hatcho*. We like the first two to deepen the flavor of salad dressings, glazes, and marinades.

2 Sauerkraut

REUBEN ESSENTIAL

True sauerkraut is the result of wild fermentation (meaning that it uses lactic acid bacteria already present in and on the vegetable). It is often flavored with either juniper berries or caraway seeds. It's bacteria, though, that lends sauerkraut its trademark flavor. Sauerkraut can be served piled on a Reuben sandwich or used as an ingredient in cooked dishes like our Kielbasa Casserole (**CooksCountry.com/kielbasacasserole**).

3 Fish Sauce

SIGNATURE SMELL

Fish sauce is called *nuoc nam* in Vietnam and *nam pla* in Thailand, but its pungent, fishy aroma is unmistakable. Made from salted, fermented fish, water, salt, and sometimes sugar, it's a highly concentrated liquid that adds complexity to foods—and when used carefully, no trace of fishiness. And it's not just for Asian dishes: We use it for depth in our Gumbo (**CooksCountry.com/gumbo**). Find it in most supermarkets near the soy sauce.

4 Yogurt

PERFECTLY CULTURED

This fermented milk product comes from the Turkish word for "condense." Milk is heated and then cooled to just over 100 degrees before a bacteria culture is added. After 4 to 8 hours, the mixture thickens into yogurt. You can use yogurt in sauces, in salad dressings, or as a topping as you would sour cream. Yogurt adds moisture and tangy flavor to our Lemon–Poppy Seed Muffins (**CooksCountry.com/lemonpoppymuffins**).

5 Kimchi

FUNKY VEGETABLES

While this spicy, crunchy Korean pickle is most commonly made with napa cabbage, it can be made with radish, cucumber—even watermelon rind. The vegetables are chopped and then salted (to pull out moisture) or packed in a liquid brine. Since the vegetables release carbon dioxide as they ferment, kimchi often has an effervescent quality; some versions have chiles for heat.

6 Sour Pickles

INTENSE PUCKER

Unlike sweet pickles, which are preserved in a vinegar solution, true sour pickles (and half-sours, which use less salt) are the product of fermentation. Herbs and spices like dill, mustard seed, coriander, or garlic add dimension. After as little as a week in solution, the lactic acid bacteria have done their work and the pickles are salty, sour, and crisp.

7 Chocolate

SECRET STEP

Without fermentation, products made from the cacao plant would taste acrid. After the cacao pods are picked, the beans and pulp inside are scooped out and left to sit outdoors for four to seven days, often in wooden crates. Naturally occurring yeasts grow on the pulp, helping decrease the overall pH level. The pulp is discarded and the beans are dried in the sun before being refined into cocoa.

8 Kefir

TRANSFORMATIVE GRAINS

Kefir, which is becoming more widely available in supermarkets, is akin to a drinkable yogurt. Kefir cultures are added to milk and left to ferment at room temperature for as little as 24 hours and then refrigerated for a few days. As the milk ferments, it becomes thicker and takes on a tart, sometimes bubbly quality. You can drink kefir straight or blend it with fruits or vegetables for a smoothie.

9 Soy Sauce

SALTY BREW

Made from soybeans and wheat, salty, pungent soy sauce is left to ferment anywhere from two days to four years, which can explain the widely divergent flavors and quality of different commercial brands. We take advantage of its flavor-boosting qualities to intensify beef stew, meatloaf, and even pot pies. Our favorite is Lee Kum Kee Table Top Premium Soy Sauce.

10 Preserved Lemons

MELLOW RIND

This savory take on citrus has Middle Eastern origins. Lemons are scored deeply, packed with coarse salt and lemon juice, and left to ferment for six to eight weeks. As the lemons ferment, the rinds soften in texture and mellow in flavor. Once preserved, the rinds (as well as the flesh, if desired) can be chopped to add a tart, salty-sweet note to braises, pan sauces, vinaigrettes, and more.

11 Vinegar

WINE GONE BAD

Vinegar is the last stop on grape juice's fermentation adventure. Its initial fermentation turns it into wine, of course, but if left undrunk and exposed to air and room temperature, over time bacteria and yeasts in the wine convert the sugars into acid. To speed things up, manufacturers often use a vinegar "mother," a thick blob of cellulose and acetic acid–forming bacteria.

12 Salami

AIR-DRIED

Salting and drying is essential for any cured meat, but salami recipes also typically include a starter culture of lactic acid–producing bacteria that acts as a preservative and lends a signature faintly sour flavor. The lactic acid feeds on carbohydrates in the mix (often sugar) while the salted meat rests, ferments, and dries in cool storage over several months.

Mixed Berry Scones

What does an antique store in rural western Massachusetts have to offer the test kitchen? Inspiration for big, bold, berry-filled scones. BY MORGAN BOLLING

A COOK'S INSPIRATION CAN strike in unlikely spots. Case in point: Freight House Antiques in Erving, Massachusetts, where our executive food editor Bryan Roof stopped a few months back. Turns out that the place has an attached coffee shop, where each day proprietor Rita Dubay sets out a display of pies, muffins, and more baked goods—including massive, sweet, crumbly mixed berry scones that Roof loved so much he raced back to the test kitchen determined that we should create a version ourselves.

We have company recipes for scones that vary from traditional, dense English scones to cakey, sweet American styles. I baked and sampled my way through several American-style recipes trying to imitate Dubay's scones, to no avail. So I headed out to Freight House myself to learn her tricks. But like many great cooks, while she gave us some clues, Dubay's recipe would remain a secret.

Determined nonetheless, I returned to the test kitchen and started grating frozen butter into flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder—several recipes agreed that this technique helps produce a flaky scone—and then mixed in milk, eggs, and frozen berries before shaping the dough into scones and baking them off.

The frozen berries were causing me issues right off the bat, bleeding into my batter and leaving me with blue-marbled scones. Plus, the berry flavor was more tart than sweet. I found that tossing the frozen berries with confectioners' sugar before mixing them into the other dry ingredients controlled the bleed and beat back the tartness.

I still had some issues, though. The grated butter left nice buttery pockets in my scones, but grating frozen sticks of butter was a pain. I wondered if I could get the same effect with the food processor. I pulsed the chilled butter into the dry ingredients, leaving pea-size chunks, but when I baked this batch, the butter pieces didn't fully incorporate into the dough and leached out onto the baking sheet. I tried processing in the butter until it was fully incorporated, but these scones lacked richness.

Another cook in the kitchen suggested combining the two methods, processing in half the butter until fully incorporated and then pulsing in the second half for larger chunks. Now I had rich scones packed with biscuit-like butter pockets. A brushing of honey butter on top of the scones before the final 5 to 8 minutes of baking gave them a nice sheen and sweet finish.

With a few adjustments (see "To Make Ahead") I found that I could freeze the unbaked scones without sacrificing flavor or texture. I could make a batch of dough on Sunday, freeze the shaped scones, and bake them off one at a time throughout the week.

MIXED BERRY SCONES Makes 8 scones

Work the dough as little as possible, just until it comes together. Work quickly to keep the butter and berries as cold as possible for the best results. Note that the butter is divided in this recipe. An equal amount of frozen blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, or strawberries (halved) can be used in place of the mixed berries.

SCONES

- 1¾ cups (8¾ ounces) frozen mixed berries
- 3 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
- 3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 12 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces, chilled
- ⅓ cup (2⅓ ounces) granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons whole milk
- 1 large egg plus 1 large yolk

GLAZE

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon honey

For convenience, these scones are engineered to work with frozen berries.

1. **FOR THE SCONES:** Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. If your berry mix contains strawberries, cut them in half. Toss berries with confectioners' sugar in bowl; freeze until needed.

2. Combine flour, 6 tablespoons butter, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt in food processor and process until butter is fully incorporated, about 15 seconds. Add remaining 6 tablespoons butter and pulse until butter is reduced to pea-size pieces, 10 to 12 pulses. Transfer mixture to large bowl. Stir in berries.

3. Beat milk and egg and yolk together in separate bowl. Make well in center of flour mixture and pour in milk mixture. Using rubber spatula, gently stir mixture, scraping from edges of bowl and folding inward until very shaggy dough forms and some bits of flour remain. Do not overmix.

4. Turn out dough onto well-floured counter and, if necessary, knead briefly until dough just comes together, about 3 turns. Using your floured hands and bench scraper, shape dough into 12-by-4-inch rectangle, about 1½ inches tall. Using knife or bench scraper, cut dough crosswise into 4 equal rectangles. Cut each rectangle diagonally into 2 triangles (you should have 8 scones total). Transfer scones to prepared sheet. Bake until scones are lightly golden on top, 16 to 18 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

5. **FOR THE GLAZE:** While scones bake, combine melted butter and honey in small bowl.

6. Remove scones from oven and brush tops evenly with glaze mixture. Return scones to oven and continue to bake until golden brown on top, 5 to 8 minutes longer. Transfer scones to wire rack and let cool for at least 10 minutes before serving.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Unbaked scones can be frozen for several weeks. After cutting scones into triangles in step 4, freeze them on baking sheet. Transfer frozen scones to zipper-lock freezer bag. When ready to bake, heat oven to 375 degrees and extend cooking time in step 4 to 23 to 26 minutes. Glaze time in step 6 will remain at 5 to 8 minutes.

Four-at-a-Time Quesadillas

You can fit only one or two quesadillas in a skillet at once. We wanted to find a way to make four tasty quesadillas with perfectly melted cheese in one go. BY MORGAN BOLLING

YOU MAY BE asking yourself, "Do I really need a recipe for tortillas stuffed with cheese?" Answer Yes, especially if you're making quesadillas for a small crowd of four to six hungry diners.

Traditionally, quesadillas are cooked on a metal *comal*, a type of Mexican griddle. Because of the direct contact with the hot surface (and a coating of butter, oil, or lard), quesadillas cooked on a comal crisp beautifully around the edges, staying just supple enough to eat. Most home cooks today use a skillet, but who has a skillet big enough to fit four quesadillas? Not I. So I turned my attention to the oven.

I found several recipes for oven baked quesadillas but was disheartened to learn that the dry heat of a 350 degree oven (the temperature most recipes called for) made for dry, pale, and all around inferior quesadillas. Cranking the heat to 450 degrees and flipping the quesadillas—stuffed with nothing more than shredded Monterey Jack cheese for now—halfway through cooking gave me nice, even, flavorful browning.

But the tortillas were still dry. One of the best stovetop recipes I found called for shallow frying the quesadillas in a hefty dose of oil. Could I get the same effect by using more fat in the oven? After testing various types and amounts of fats, I found that coating the rimmed baking sheet with 3 tablespoons of vegetable oil worked wonders for creating a crisp—but not dry—exterior. Now I could focus on the fillings.

In Mexico the most common option is Oaxaca ("wa HA ka") cheese, named after the central Mexican state it comes from. The salty, buttery cheese melts beautifully but can be hard to find in the States. I ordered a pound of it from a specialty shop and tested it against six widely available varieties: the Monterey Jack I had been using, along with various cheddars, American, mozzarella, and provolone. After much munching, we decided a combination of provolone and mozzarella was the best approximation for Oaxaca cheese. Provolone gave a nutty richness, while creamy mozzarella melted perfectly. Some minced jarred jalapeños gave the filling a little spark.

The hardest part of this recipe is letting the quesadillas cool for 5 minutes before you dig in.

These cheese tests showed me that a full cup of shredded cheese was the best amount for each 10 inch flour tortilla. But by the time the tortillas were browned, the cheese was bubbling out onto my baking sheet. I tried adding a little cornstarch to the shredded cheese to slow its melting. This helped but made the cheese chalky. When a colleague saw that I was pulling the sheet out of the oven to flip the tortillas at the halfway point, she suggested that I try adding the cheese at the flip stage rather than at the beginning. I browned four folded tortillas on one side; then after flipping them, I filled each with cheese. With this new method the cheese was in the oven for only the final 4 to 6 minutes of baking—the ideal amount of time to melt without leaking out.

It's not a hard or time-consuming process, but yes, the best quesadillas do require a little technique—and a recipe. This recipe.

TEST KITCHEN DISCOVERY

Wait on the Cheese

To prevent the cheese from liquefying and running onto the baking sheet, we add it only after the first side of each quesadilla has been browned. This arrangement on the baking sheet isn't random: It's the best way to fit four large quesadillas at once.

QUESADILLAS FOR A CROWD

Serves 4 to 6

Letting the quesadillas cool before cutting them is important; straight from the oven the cheese is molten and will ooze out. Serve the quesadillas with pico de gallo, guacamole, and/or sour cream.

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 8 ounces provolone cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 8 ounces whole-milk mozzarella cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- ¼ cup minced jarred jalapeños
- 4 (10-inch) flour tortillas

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Brush rimmed baking sheet with oil.

2. Combine provolone, mozzarella, and jalapeños in bowl. Fold tortillas in half. Arrange folded tortillas in single layer on prepared sheet with rounded edges facing center of sheet.

3. Bake until tortilla tops and edges begin to turn spotty brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove sheet from oven. Flip tortillas over. Using tongs, open each tortilla and fill each with equal amount cheese mixture (about 1 cup each), leaving 1 inch border. Close tortillas and press firmly with spatula to compact.

4. Return quesadillas to oven and continue to bake until crisp around edges and golden brown on second side, 4 to 6 minutes longer. Remove from oven and press quesadillas gently with spatula to deflate any air bubbles. Transfer to wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes. Slice each quesadilla into 4 wedges and serve.

CHORIZO QUESADILLAS FOR A CROWD

Cook 4 ounces chorizo sausage, cut into ¼ inch pieces, in 10 inch skillet over medium heat until lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Let cool completely, then add to cheese mixture.

CILANTRO AND SCALLION QUESADILLAS FOR A CROWD

Add ¼ cup minced fresh cilantro and 2 thinly sliced scallions to cheese mixture.

Stuffed Chicken Breasts

For stuffed chicken breasts worth the bother, you need to start with the right cut. BY REBECCAH MARSTERS

THE APPEAL OF stuffed chicken breasts is clear: The impressive presentation elevates a weeknight dish, and the filling adds flavor to bland breasts. But too many versions don't deliver on the flavor part. I set out to change that.

Some initial research revealed poten tial potholes. Vegetable fillings I tested tasted grassy and steamed, bread stuff ings gummy and bland, oozy cheese based fillings lackluster, as most cheeses that melt well are mild in flavor

Two points of promise: Bone-in breasts, I found, delivered much more flavor when roasted, and salty, high impact fillings like salami and Parmesan packed the most punch. What's more, the best way to get browned skin was with a pre-oven sear in a skillet.

Visit CooksCountry.com/sept15 for a spicy feta variation of these stuffed chicken breasts.

After a few tests, my tasters and I landed on a combina tion of salami, Parmesan, and capers, enlivened with herbal notes from fresh rosemary and thyme. A little sautéed onion brought depth, and some Dijon mustard, garlic, and lemon zest rounded out the filling

TEST KITCHEN TECHN QJE

Cutting Pockets in Chicken Breasts

P ace breast skin s'de down on a cutting board with the breastbone side facing your knife hand Press on the breast with your opposite hand to flatten it slightly, and use a sharp paring knife to cut a 3-inch-long horizontal pocket in the breastbone side of the breast, stopping ½ inch from the rib side so the halves remain attached. Then use your fingers and the tip of the knife to make the pocket wider without increasing the 3-inch opening

Illustration: Jay Layman

To seal the deal, I wanted a sauce When making my next batch of stuffing mixture, I set aside some garlic, mustard, chopped herbs, and extra-virgin olive oil and mashed it together to create a flavorful paste.

Once the chicken was cooked, I moved it to a carving board and stirred the reserved herb paste into the drip pings in the pan along with a tablespoon of lemon juice. I took the breasts off the bone, sliced them into rounds, and drizzled my pan sauce over the top.

HERB-AND-PARMESAN-STUFFED CHICKEN BREASTS Serves 4

High-qua ity Parmesan makes a difference here

- 4 (12-ounce) bone-in, skin-on split chicken breasts, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
- 2 ounces sliced Genoa salami, chopped fine
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)
- 2 tablespoons capers, chopped
- ½ cup chicken broth

1. Adjust oven rack to middle posi tion and heat oven to 400 degrees. Using kitchen shears, remove any rib bones that extend beyond each breast. Working with 1 breast at a time, place skin side down on counter with breast bone side facing your knife hand. Press on breast with your opposite hand to flatten slightly and, using sharp paring knife, cut 3-inch-long horizontal pocket in breastbone side of breast, stopping ½ inch from rib side so halves remain attached. Using your fingers and tip of knife, make interior of pocket wider without increasing 3-inch opening. Season breasts inside and out with salt and pepper; set aside.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch ovensafe nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and ⅛ teaspoon salt and cook until softened and browned around edges, 4 to 6 min utes. Remove from heat and set aside to cool slightly, about 5 minutes.

You can serve the chicken on the bone, but we prefer to remove the bones and slice the breasts before serving.

3. Combine lemon zest, garlic, thyme, mustard, rosemary, and 2 table spoons oil in bowl; set aside 2 teaspoons oil mixture for sauce. Stir salami, Parme san, capers, onion, 1 teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon salt into remaining oil mixture, mashing against side of bowl with back of spoon until stuffing mix ture clumps together.

4. Place about 3 tablespoons stuff ing mixture into pocket of each breast, pressing into ends of pockets with your fingers to fill completely and evenly. Fold breast over to enclose. Secure each breast with 3 evenly spaced pieces of kitchen twine. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels.

5. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook breasts skin side down until well browned, about 7 minutes, moving as needed for evenly browned skin.

6. Flip breasts skin side up, add broth to skillet, and transfer to oven. Roast until thickest part of stuffing registers 160 degrees, 30 to 37 minutes. Transfer breasts to carving board, tent with alu minum foil, and let rest for 15 minutes.

7. Meanwhile, pour pan juices into liquid measuring cup (skillet handle will be hot) and skim off fat. Stir in lemon juice and reserved oil mixture; season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove twine, then carve breasts from bones. Slice ½ inch thick, transfer to serving platter, and drizzle with sauce. Serve

Old-Fashioned Frozen Custard

You won't need to dust off your ice cream maker for our version of this rich, supremely creamy frozen treat. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

FROZEN CUSTARD ISN'T just a fancy name for ice cream, it's actually a lovely frozen treat in its own right—as refreshing on a hot summer afternoon as it is soothing on a cool autumn evening. The popular regional sweet treat (Wisconsin, New York, and Arkansas all claim versions as their own) takes its name from a custard base that includes egg yolks and heavy cream for a luxurious texture.

Commercial frozen custard—the thick, soft serve–like treat made famous by the Kohr Brothers in Coney Island and Kopp's in Milwaukee—requires an industrial condenser to produce its almost taffy-like consistency. But through research, I found recipes for frozen custard in cookbooks written as far back as the late 19th century, long before ice cream makers. I decided to pursue this old-fashioned technique.

Taking a cue from several of these old recipes, I started my testing with a custard: specifically, crème anglaise, a classic French cooked custard of cream, milk, sugar, egg yolks, and vanilla. After the mixture reached 180 degrees, I transferred it to a bowl set inside a bigger bowl of ice to quickly cool. Then I followed an approach common to early ice cream recipes and poured the mixture into a baking dish for freezing (the extra surface area this vessel creates helps it freeze quickly). The flavor was excellent. But the texture? Riddled with ice crystals.

The key to supersmooth frozen custard is limiting the buildup of ice crystals as it freezes. How do you do this? Incorporating and churning air reduces the effect of ice crystals—the enemy of smooth ice cream or frozen custard—on the tongue. Machines add this air, and break down the ice crystals, by constantly churning the mixture as it freezes. Most machine-free recipes mimic this action by asking the cook to stir or whisk the mixture periodically during freezing. But I wanted a mostly hands-off approach. What would happen, I wondered, if I incorporated air into the mixture before I froze it? I whipped my custard in a stand mixer, testing varying lengths of whipping time, and achieved a relatively smooth custard after about 3 minutes.

But I wanted better than "relatively" smooth. I wanted perfect. I experimented with different amounts and combinations of dairy ingredients, including heavy cream, half-and-half, whole milk, sweetened condensed milk, and evaporated milk. I found that a combination of heavy cream and whole milk was best. (A little nonfat dry milk powder enhanced the dairy flavor.)

Sugar plays a dual role in frozen custard—as a sweetener and as further insurance against ice crystals. So does corn syrup, but because it's only 40 percent as sweet as white sugar, corn syrup does the job without adding unneeded sweetness. After whipping in plenty of air and freezing the custard, I found its texture silky and creamy.

With a freezer full of baking dishes, I was delighted to find that the custard froze just perfectly in a quart-size plastic container.

Our smooth, creamy frozen custard is made with a stand mixer, not an ice cream maker

Steps to Smooth Frozen Custard

1. TEMPER
Heating the cream mixture before slowly adding it to the cold yolk mixture prevents the eggs from curdling.

2. STRAIN
Pouring the warm custard through a strainer removes any pieces of cooked egg.

3. CHILL
Cooling the custard on ice primes it for adding air.

4. WHIP
Finally, whipping the cooled custard adds air to make the final texture especially creamy.

Frozen Custard vs. Ice Cream: Cracking Open the Difference

According to guidelines administered by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, both ice cream and frozen custard must contain at least 10 percent milk fat (along with milk, cream, sweeteners, flavorings, and so forth). The main difference between them is eggs. While egg yolks are optional in ice cream bases (and occasionally do appear on ingredient lists), they are absolutely required in frozen custard. Frozen custards must contain at least 1.4 percent yolks by weight. The resulting frozen treat is eggier and richer than ice cream.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

OLD-FASHIONED VANILLA FROZEN CUSTARD

Makes about 1 quart

One teaspoon of vanilla extract can be substituted for the vanilla bean; stir the extract into the strained custard in step 3. Use an instant-read thermometer for the best results.

- 6 large egg yolks
- ¼ cup (1¾ ounces) sugar
- 2 tablespoons nonfat dry milk powder
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ½ cup whole milk
- ⅓ cup light corn syrup
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 vanilla bean

1. Whisk egg yolks, sugar, and milk powder in bowl until smooth, about 30 seconds; set aside. Combine cream, milk, corn syrup, and salt in medium saucepan. Cut vanilla bean in half lengthwise. Using tip of paring knife, scrape out vanilla seeds and add to cream mixture, along with vanilla bean. Heat cream mixture over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until it steams steadily and registers 175 degrees, about 5 minutes. Remove saucepan from heat.

2. Slowly whisk heated cream mixture into yolk mixture to temper. Return cream-yolk mixture to saucepan and cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens and registers 180 degrees, 4 to 6 minutes.

3. Immediately pour custard through fine-mesh strainer set over large bowl; discard vanilla bean. Fill slightly larger bowl with ice and set custard bowl in bowl of ice. Transfer to refrigerator and let chill until custard registers 40 degrees, 1 to 2 hours, stirring occasionally.

4. Transfer chilled custard to stand mixer fitted with whisk and whip on medium-high speed for 3 minutes, or until mixture increases in volume to about 3¾ cups. Pour custard into airtight 1-quart container. Cover and freeze until firm, at least 6 hours, before serving. (Frozen custard is best eaten within 10 days.)

OLD-FASHIONED CHOCOLATE FROZEN CUSTARD

Use 60 percent cacao bittersweet chocolate.

Omit vanilla bean. Add ½ ounce finely chopped bittersweet chocolate and 1 tablespoon Dutch-processed cocoa to cream mixture in step 1 before cooking. Add ½ teaspoon vanilla extract to strained custard in step 3.

Sweet Glazed Peaches

True, it might seem impossible to improve on a perfect peach. But we didn't let that stop us from trying. BY DIANE JNGER

HOW DO YOU eat your way through an overabundance of ripe, in-season peaches? Some folks grill them for a side dish; others chop them into a fruit salad. I wanted something different: A warm, summery dessert with just enough added sweetness to amplify the peaches' complex, soothing flavors.

I found dozens of recipes for glazed peaches, and after a few days in the kitchen, I'd learned that most cover up fruit with cloyingly sweet syrup. What's more, some peaches turned to mush in the oven. None had the light-handed sweetness or velvety texture I wanted.

I gathered another pile of peaches and hit the kitchen. I peeled several peaches (a serrated vegetable peeler made this a breeze), halved and pitted them, tossed the halves with sugar, and baked them at 300 degrees for 40 minutes, thinking that the low temperature would gently caramelize the sugar into a sticky sweet glaze.

> Visit CooksCountry.com/sept15 for our Honey-Glazed Peaches and Raspberry-Glazed Peaches

Wrong. By the time the peaches took on any color, there was nothing but mush in the dish. And the sugar had turned bitter during its long stay in the dry heat. I needed a complete rethink.

For my next round, I tossed the peaches with sugar and a little lemon juice for balance and tried a 450-degree oven. The peaches held their shapes, but by the time they were warm all the way through, the sugar had burned. I switched to broiling, thinking that the direct heat might give me a little color on top before the peaches overcooked. Adding a bit of water to the pan helped prevent sticking.

I was right. The three small adjustments gave me the soft but firm texture I wanted after about 18 minutes in the oven. To boost the flavor, I took the next batch of peaches out after about 11 minutes and brushed them with a mixture of melted butter and red currant jelly before returning them to the broiler. Five more minutes was all it took to get a beautiful, lightly browned batch of peaches with a sticky glaze. A bit more glaze drizzled over, plus a few nuts for texture, and I had a simple, sweet summertime dessert.

Toasted, chopped pistachios add a burst of color and a nice crunch to the silky peaches

SWEET GLAZED PEACHES Serves 6

Use a serrated peeler to peel the peaches. These peaches are best served warm with vanilla ice cream or frozen custard.

- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 6 firm, ripe peaches, peeled, halved, and pitted
- ⅓ cup water
- ¼ cup red currant jelly
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- ¼ cup pistachios, toasted and chopped

1. Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Combine lemon juice, sugar, and salt in large bowl. Add peaches and toss to combine, making sure to coat all sides with sugar mixture.

2. Transfer peaches, cut side up, to 12-inch ovensafe skillet. Pour any remaining sugar mixture into peach cavities. Pour water around peaches in skillet. Broil until peaches are just beginning to brown, 11 to 15 minutes.

3. Combine jelly and butter in bowl and microwave until melted, about 30 seconds, then stir to combine. Remove peaches from oven and brush half of jelly mixture over peaches. Return peaches to oven and continue to broil until spotty brown, 5 to 7 minutes.

4. Remove skillet from oven, brush peaches with remaining jelly mixture, and transfer peaches to serving platter, leaving juices behind. Bring accumulated juices in skillet to simmer over medium heat and cook until syrupy, about 1 minute. Pour syrup over peaches. Sprinkle with pistachios and serve.

Honey Cake

This holiday cake often tastes mostly of spices or fruit. Shouldn't honey cake taste like honey? BY MORGAN BOLLING

HONEY CAKE, BESIDES being a sweet treat as good for breakfast as it is for dessert, is a staple at dinners celebrating Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, as a symbol of a sweet new year. As I found in my research, traditions and recipes for this yearly treat vary from family to family—and cooks have very strong opinions about what makes a good one (or a bad one).

To learn more about this cake firsthand, I headed into our cookbook library, found six promising recipes, and baked samples. The cakes smelled great coming out of the test kitchen ovens, so as soon as they were cool, I eagerly grabbed a slice of each.

My enthusiasm quickly dwindled. These cakes were not pleasant to eat, as they were by turns greasy, gummy, or dry. The biggest problem, though, was that even the ones with passable textures had dominant flavors of warm spices, citrus, or liquor—everything but honey. They all had honey in them, all right, but we just couldn't taste it.

I decided to hit the reset button and start from scratch with a simple *Cook's Country* Bundt cake (though honey cakes come in all shapes and sizes from loaves to sheets, Bundt cakes are big and festive, perfect for the holidays). For my first test, I replaced half the sugar with honey and, to make the cake compatible with kosher dietary laws, used vegetable oil instead of butter (most honey cake recipes do the same). A straight swap of oil for butter didn't work, though, as it made for exactly the kind of greasy cake we rejected in the initial testing.

I tried reducing the oil in various amounts, but my tasters were never satisfied with the results. Cakes were still either too greasy, gummy, or dry, with no apparent sweet spot. Trying to brainstorm other ingredients that could add moisture, I considered applesauce. Could this trick, usually reserved for "healthier" desserts, work here?

After trying various amounts in combination with a bit of oil, I landed on 6 tablespoons of applesauce and 4 tablespoons of vegetable oil. The applesauce lent moisture and a subtle, fruity background sweetness but, I was happy to discover, didn't make the cake taste like apples at all. This combination, along with both baking soda and baking powder, gave me a tender, tall cake with plenty of moisture.

While honey is the dominant flavor in the cake, the batter also contains orange juice and applesauce.

On to the honey. All the recipes I tried early on called for at least some sugar in addition to the honey, but I was determined to use honey as the cake's sole source of sweetness. I baked through a slew of sticky tests where I slowly subbed out the sugar for honey ¼ cup at a time. I was pleased that the cake that traded all the sugar for honey turned out to be our favorite—it had a strong honey flavor.

But as is often the case in cooking (and particularly in baking), solving one problem created another. Honey is sweeter than sugar and browns more quickly, so now the cake was turning too brown, too quickly, in the oven. After several tests at various temperatures, I found that backing down just slightly from my 350-degree baking temperature, to 325 degrees, evened out the cooking for the best well-browned but moist cake.

I whisked together a simple vanilla-flavored glaze to dress up the cake with minimal effort.

When I cut a slice, I knew I'd achieved the holiday-worthy cake I had initially envisioned. Most important, it tasted how we thought honey cake should taste: like honey.

HONEY CAKE Serves 12

Make sure to use unsweetened applesauce in this cake. If you plan to make this cake ahead of time, hold off on glazing it until 30 minutes before serving. You'll need 20 ounces of honey for this recipe. This cake is sticky; baking spray with flour provides the cleanest release, but if you have only regular cooking spray, apply a heavy coat and then dust the inside of the pan with flour.

CAKE

- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup water
- 4 large eggs
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons unsweetened applesauce
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- ¼ cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1¾ cups honey

GLAZE

- 1 cup (4 ounces) confectioners' sugar
- 4½ teaspoons water
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch salt

1. FOR THE CAKE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Heavily spray 12 cup nonstick Bundt pan with baking spray with flour. Whisk flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda together in large bowl. Whisk water, eggs, applesauce, oil, orange juice, and vanilla together in separate bowl until combined. Whisk honey into egg mixture until fully incorporated.

2. Whisk honey mixture into flour mixture until combined. Scrape batter into prepared pan. Bake until skewer inserted into middle of cake comes out clean, 45 to 55 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

3. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 30 minutes. Using small spatula, loosen cake from sides of pan and invert onto rack. Let cool completely, about 2 hours. (Cooled cake can be wrapped with plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 3 days.)

4. FOR THE GLAZE: Whisk together all ingredients. Drizzle glaze evenly over top of cake. Let sit until glaze is firm, about 30 minutes. Serve.

The Buzz About Honey

Honey cakes are typically sweetened with sugar and use just a little honey—no wonder most don't taste like honey. We ditch the sugar completely in favor of a whopping 1¾ cups of honey for bold flavor.

LOTS OF HONEY
1¾ cups gives maximum honey flavor.

DON'T MAKE THIS MISTAKE

A Bundt Cake that Sticks

Thoroughly greasing the pan is especially important for cakes baked in Bundt pans, because the accordion edges of these pans hold stubbornly to cakes, making it uncomfortably likely for cakes to stick and crumble. Our Honey Cake recipe calls for coating the pan with baking spray with flour, which we found did the best job of providing a clean release after baking and cooling. If you only have regular baking spray on hand, apply a liberal coat and then dust the pan with flour, tipping out the excess before adding the batter.

SOME CAKE COMES OUT

SOME DOESN'T

For the easiest, cleanest release, we grease the pan with baking spray and flour.

WHAT'S THE BEST SUPERMARKET HONEY?

America has a sky-high demand for honey: According to the National Honey Board, we eat more than 400 million pounds of the stuff every year. Considering that the average honeybee produces only ½ of a teaspoon of honey over its lifetime, that's a lot of bees.

To keep up with the demand, manufacturers source honey from all over the globe. Today, the average jar of honey on supermarket shelves is actually a mix of honeys from many hives that's been carefully blended and processed to engineer a preferred flavor and color. ("Single-source" honeys are a different breed entirely.)

Most supermarket honey is processed one of two ways. Traditional honey is usually heated to thin it enough so that it can pass under high pressure through fine strainers to remove pollen and give the honey a clear appearance, which consumers prefer. Raw honey, by contrast, is usually heated only high enough (about 120 degrees) to prevent it from crystallizing on store shelves. The honey is then lightly strained to remove debris and leftover wax, but it's not filtered under high pressure and retains most of its pollen.

To find the best supermarket honey, we selected five top-selling honeys—three traditional and two raw. Twenty-one America's Test Kitchen staffers tried each product plain and in honey cake.

In both tastings, we universally preferred the two raw honeys, calling them "complex," with "slight bitterness" and "strong floral notes." Traditional honeys, by contrast, were "one-note" and "aggressively sweet." Some were so "cloying" that tasters thought the samples were corn syrup. What accounts for the flavor difference?

Our science editor explained that pollen contains alkaloids and phenolics—chemicals that add complex, slightly bitter flavors. Tasters liked how these tempered the sweetness of honey. The fact that raw honey is also heated more gently likely helps preserve its delicate, nuanced flavors. These flavors showed through when we used the honey as an ingredient in cake, too: Tasters deemed cakes made with raw honey "more complex" than cakes made with traditional honey.

Flavor is also influenced by what the bees feed on, and most manufacturers list the primary diet of their bees on honey jars. The traditional honeys in our lineup were primarily sourced from clover-eating bees, while the raw brands were mixtures from bees that feasted on all sorts of grasses and flowers. Tasters noted strong floral and grassy notes in raw honeys and milder flavors in clover honey.

So when shopping for honey, look for the word "raw" on the label and choose a product that comes from bees with a varied diet. Our favorite product, Nature Nate's 100% Pure Raw and Unfiltered Honey, sources its honey from bees that feed on a blend of wildflowers, clover, Chinese tallow, and vetch; it was slightly bitter and floral, with a deep, balanced sweetness. —LAUREN SAVOIE

RECOMMENDED

NATURE NATE'S 100% Pure Raw and Unfiltered Honey
Price: $12.63 for 16 oz ($0.79 per oz)
Type: Raw
Bee Diet: Wildflowers, clover, Chinese tallow, and vetch

TASTERS' NOTES: This raw honey had "big flowery flavor" with "rich," "bold" notes of "citrus," "clover," and "anise." Tasters loved this "complex" product's "mild" sweetness and "slight acidity," which added "brightness" to honey cake.

AUNT SUE'S Raw-Wild Honey
Price: $8.92 for 16 oz ($0.56 per oz)
Type: Raw
Bee Diet: Wildflowers

"Sweet" and "smoky," this raw wildflower honey balanced "nutty" notes of "caramel" and "cocoa" with "spicy," "herby," "floral" flavors. Tasters liked the "hint of bitterness" in this honey, which tempered the sweetness of the cake.

SUE BEE Clover Honey
Price: $3.54 for 8 oz ($0.44 per oz)
Type: Traditional
Bee Diet: Clover

This "light," "mild" honey was "sweet" and "fruity" with just a touch of bitterness. Though some tasters found this offering "a tad boring" when sampled on its own, most enjoyed its "delicate," "mellow" sweetness in honey cake.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

BURLESON'S Pure Clover Honey
Price: $5.98 for 24 oz ($0.25 per oz)
Type: Traditional
Bee Diet: Clover

Though many tasters equated this product's "supersweet," "pure sugar" flavor with the "classic" honey profile, others thought this honey was "one note" and "cloyingly sweet." In cake, most found it "just fine."

GUNTER'S Pure Clover Honey
Price: $7.59 for 12 oz ($0.63 per oz)
Type: Traditional
Bee Diet: Clover

Tasters didn't mind this "supersweet" honey as an ingredient in cake, but when sampled plain it was "one-dimensional," "tooth-ache-inducing," and "overpoweringly sweet." "Is this corn syrup?" asked one taster.

Cooking Class How to Make a Frittata

With a little finesse, you can make a golden, tender frittata every time. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

PARMESAN AND BASIL FRITTATA Serves 4

You can substitute parsley or chives for the basil

- 12 large eggs
- 1½ ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (¾ cup)
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 3 tablespoons half-and-half
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Whisk eggs, Parmesan, basil, half-and-half, salt, and pepper together in bowl until well combined, about 30 seconds; set aside.

2. Heat oil in 10-inch ovensafe nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add egg mixture and cook, using rubber spatula to stir and scrape bottom of skillet, until large curds form and spatula begins to leave wake but eggs are still very wet, about 2 minutes. Shake skillet to distribute eggs evenly; cook, without stirring, for 30 seconds to let bottom set.

3. Bake until surface of frittata is puffy and golden, about 5 minutes (When cut into with paring knife, eggs should be slightly wet.) Remove skillet from oven and let stand for 5 minutes to finish cooking. Using spatula, loosen frittata from skillet and slide onto platter or cutting board. Cut into wedges and serve.

ASPARAGUS, HAM, AND GRUYÈRE FRITTATA

Substitute ¾ cup shredded Gruyère for Parmesan and omit basil. Cook 8 ounces trimmed asparagus, cut on bias into ¼-inch pieces, in oil in step 2 (before adding eggs) until lightly browned and almost tender, about 3 minutes. Add 4 ounces deli ham, cut into ½-inch pieces, and 1 minced shallot and cook until shallot softens slightly, about 2 minutes. Add egg mixture and proceed with recipe.

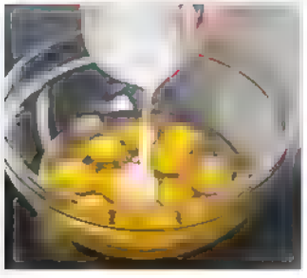
LEEK, PROSCIUTTO, AND GOAT CHEESE FRITTATA

Substitute 1 cup crumbled goat cheese for Parmesan and increase basil to ¼ cup. Cook white and light green parts of 2 halved, thinly sliced, and washed leeks in oil in step 2 (before adding eggs), covered, until softened, 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut into ½-inch-wide strips, with egg mixture and proceed with recipe.

MUSHROOM AND CHIVE FRITTATA

Substitute ¼ cup minced fresh chives for basil. Cook 10 ounces thinly sliced cremini mushrooms, 6 ounces thinly sliced stemmed shiitake mushrooms, and 1 finely chopped onion in oil in step 2 (before adding eggs) until dry and lightly browned, 12 to 15 minutes. Stir in 2 minced garlic cloves and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add egg mixture and proceed with recipe.

STEP BY STEP **Ten Steps to a Perfect Frittata**



1. ADD DAIRY
Add 3 tablespoons of half-and-half to the eggs.
WHY? The water in half-and-half provides steam to help the eggs puff up, while the fat adds richness and keeps the curds tender.

2. WHISK IT
Whisk the eggs, cheese, basil, half-and-half, salt, and pepper together.
WHY? Whisking ensures that the yolks are broken and that the whites and yolks are evenly distributed.

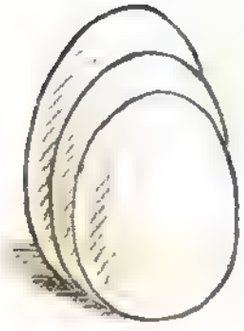
3. HEAT OIL
Heat oil in 10-inch nonstick skillet until shimmering.
WHY? Extra-virgin olive oil adds flavor and helps prevent sticking. A 10-inch skillet produces a thicker frittata.

4. STIR AND SCRAPE
Use a spatula to stir and scrape the bottom of the skillet to form large curds.
WHY? Creating large curds keeps the eggs from becoming tough and ensures quicker, more even cooking.

5. SHAKE IT
Gently shake skillet side to side.
WHY? After you've scraped the eggs into large curds, shaking the pan helps the curds settle and distribute evenly across the pan.

Good to Know

TEST KITCHEN TIPS FOR ANY EGG DISH



What's My Size?

The contents of a chicken egg can vary widely depending on the size of the bird. Bigger hens lay bigger eggs. In the test kitchen, we typically use "large" eggs. These have about 2 ounces of contents—egg and yolk—by weight, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines and our own scales. Eggs labeled "medium" weigh about 1.75 ounces, "extra large" come in at 2.25 ounces, and "jumbo" eggs weigh 2.5 ounces—sometimes more. ("Small" and "peewee" eggs, at 1.5 ounces and 1.25 ounces respectively, are rarely found in stores.)

Does "Sell By" Mean "Use By"?

All egg cartons are marked with a sell-by date, which is the legal limit until which eggs may be sold. According to the USDA, eggs are still fit for consumption for an additional three to five weeks past the sell-by date if they're refrigerated. Store eggs in their carton on a shelf in your fridge—not on the door, where temperatures can climb well over the recommended 40 degrees. In addition to blocking off-flavors (which can be an issue because eggshells are porous), the carton also helps maintain humidity, which slows down evaporation of the eggs' contents. Use your discretion, though: If the eggs smell odd or display discoloration, pitch them.

Frittata 101

Frittata versus Omelet

In terms of ingredients, frittatas are very similar to omelets—but they're much easier to make. Classic French omelets involve rolling the egg around the filling, while diner-style omelets use a folding technique that requires a strong wrist. Frittatas, on the other hand, are served open-faced with the filling stirred into the egg base. The most important thing is to ensure that the top and bottom of the frittata are evenly cooked. While some recipes have you flip the frittata (a hot, sometimes messy technique) for even cooking, we skip the acrobatics by cooking the bottom of the frittata on the stovetop (for optimal browning) before transferring the pan to the upper rack of a hot oven to finish the top.

Curd's the Word

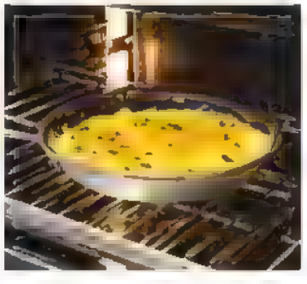
The best way to ensure a tender, not tough, frittata is to create large curds—much as you'd do for a scrambled egg dish—before the eggs are completely set. Setting the heat to medium keeps the eggs from cooking too quickly, allowing curds to build up. Moving the eggs to the center of the pan in slow, easy swipes will help you create large tender curds before the eggs fully set.

KEY EQUIPMENT Large Silicone Spatula

To ensure easy release of your frittata after cooking, it's essential to use an ovensafe nonstick pan. That means you also need a strong but flexible heatproof silicone spatula to stir and scrape the frittata without scratching the nonstick surface. We like the Rubbermaid Professional 13½-inch High-Heat Scraper because it is a no-nonsense tool that aced all our cooking tests—including making eggs. It also withstood all our attempts to stain or melt it.

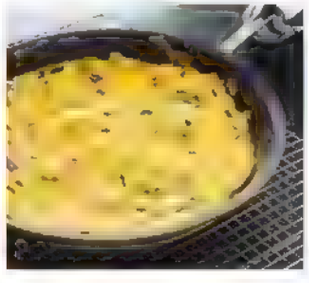
RUBBERMAID PROFESSIONAL 13½-INCH HIGH-HEAT SCRAPER
Our favorite silicone spatula.

6. LET IT BE
Cook the eggs without stirring for 30 seconds.
WHY? The bottom needs to set into a smooth, cohesive layer, so it can develop browning and provide structure.



7. BAKE
Bake on the upper-middle rack of a 450-degree oven.
WHY? The high heat (and upper position) helps the top of the frittata puff slightly and set without overcooking the bottom.

8. TEST FOR DONENESS
Use a knife to cut into the center of the frittata (be careful not to scrape the nonstick surface).
WHY? The eggs should be set but still slightly wet in the center.



9. LET REST IN PAN
Transfer the pan to a wire rack and let rest for 5 minutes.
WHY? Letting the frittata finish cooking off the heat in the pan instead of in the oven prevents overcooking.

10. RELEASE AND SLIDE
Use a spatula to release the frittata and slide it onto a serving platter.
WHY? The spatula will gently release any cooked-on egg mixture without disturbing the frittata.

Illustration: Pass Mar Donald

Slow Cooker Carnitas

For great slow-cooker carnitas, you need to rethink the braise.

BY DIANE UNGER

RICH AND SILKY WITH crisp, flavorful edges, carnitas are Mexico's version of pulled pork. They're great tucked into warm tortillas, draped over nachos, or eaten with your hands over the sink when no one is watching—when they're good, they're that good.

Like pulled pork, carnitas start with pork butt, a well-marbled cut from the shoulder of the hog that requires a long cooking time to melt out the fat and tough connective tissue and become tender. But where pulled pork calls for smoking the butt whole, recipes for carnitas usually call for cutting the butt into chunks and braising it to tenderness before finishing it on a griddle or under the broiler to create its signature crisp edges. And as you might imagine, the seasonings are different: Carnitas use citrus and Mexican seasonings instead of a barbecue rub.

The test kitchen has a carnitas recipe that is out of this world. It calls for cutting a 4-pound boneless pork butt into 2-inch chunks and braising it (in a covered Dutch oven in a 300-degree oven) in a mixture of orange juice, lime juice, and 2 cups of water seasoned with salt, pepper, cumin, oregano, and bay leaves until tender, which takes about 2 hours. Then the pork pieces are coarsely pulled apart, moistened with some of the reduced braising liquid, and quickly broiled on both sides until crisp. Fantastic. I wanted to reproduce these same great carnitas using my slow cooker.

I knew going in that I'd have to make a few adjustments. I upped the citrus juice by a few tablespoons, knowing that long cooking in a covered environment has a tendency to mute its flavors. Similarly, I increased the amounts of cumin and oregano so that the finished dish would have plenty of seasoning. But the pork pieces were swimming in liquid by the time they were fork-tender (which took about 9 hours on low), and all that liquid was washing out the flavor. I tried another test in which I omitted the 2 cups of water up front, and now I was in business. The meat gave up just enough of its own deliciously porky juices during cooking to leave me with sufficient liquid to moisten the shreds before crisping them.

Since the slow cooker should be all about ease, I wanted to find a way around using forks to pull apart each chunk of cooked pork. I found that a few quick strokes with a potato masher did the trick. As for the crisping step, broiling worked just fine, but I wanted to be able to monitor the browning without having to peek inside the oven every 30 seconds. Instead, I browned the meat (with 1 cup of its juices added to keep things moist) in a 12-inch nonstick skillet, which took only about 12 minutes and gave me great results. Make sure to serve this pork with tortillas and plenty of garnishes like chopped onion, cilantro, radishes, sour cream, and lime wedges. Although if no one is looking, all you'll need to eat these carnitas are your hands.

KEY INGREDIENTS
Orange and Lime

Pork butt is a rich, flavorful cut. To help balance some of that heft of flavor, carnitas recipes usually employ some type of citrus. We found that a combination of fresh orange and lime juices and zests really made our carnitas sing.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE
Crisping Carnitas

Once the meat has finished braising in the slow cooker, you also need to crisp it up. We like to do this in a nonstick skillet with some of the braising liquid added to keep the pork from drying out as it crisps.

We tuck carnitas into warmed tortillas and top them with vibrant garnishes.

SLOW-COOKER PORK CARNITAS

Serves 6 to 8

Remove the lime and orange zest with a vegetable peeler. Pork butt roast is often labeled Boston butt. Do not overtrim the pork; this extra fat is essential to keeping the pork moist and helping it brown when sautéed in step 3. We like to serve carnitas with warmed corn tortillas and a variety of toppings, like finely chopped onion, fresh cilantro leaves, thinly sliced radishes, sour cream, and lime wedges.

- **1 (3- to 3½-pound) boneless pork butt roast, lightly trimmed and cut into 2-inch chunks**
- **1 small onion, peeled and halved**
- **3 (2-inch) strips orange zest plus ½ cup juice**
- **3 (2-inch) strips lime zest plus 2 tablespoons juice**
- **5 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 tablespoon ground cumin**
- **1 tablespoon dried oregano**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **2 tablespoons vegetable oil**

1. Combine pork, onion, orange zest and juice, lime zest and juice, garlic, cumin, oregano, 2½ teaspoons salt, 1½ teaspoons pepper, and bay leaves in slow cooker. Cover and cook until fork slips easily in and out of pork, 5 to 7 hours on high or 8 to 10 hours on low.

2. Using slotted spoon, transfer pork from slow cooker to large bowl. Using potato masher, smash pork until coarsely shredded. Strain cooking liquid from slow cooker through fine-mesh strainer set over separate bowl and discard solids.

3. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add pork to skillet. Whisk cooking liquid to recombine, then add 1 cup to skillet with pork. Cook, stirring occasionally, until liquid has evaporated and pork is evenly browned and crispy in spots, 10 to 15 minutes.

4. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer pork to serving platter and moisten with ¼ cup remaining cooking liquid, or more as needed. Serve.

One-Pan Dinner Chicken Legs with Cauliflower and Tomatoes

Sometimes the key to the perfect one-pan dinner is making the right incision. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

CHICKEN LEG QUARTERS MIGHT just be the most woefully underused cuts of the bird. But why? Leg quarters are cheap, easy to work with, full of flavor, and hard to overcook—drumsticks, especially, become more tender with prolonged cooking. I wanted to roast the chicken legs simultaneously with cauliflower, another often neglected ingredient that is superb roasted, for an easy weeknight dinner with minimal cleanup. My goals: ease and great flavor.

Leg quarters have thicker and fattier skin than breasts, and you need to render that fat during cooking so the skin isn't rubbery. I followed the lead of a fantastic *Cook's Country* recipe for grilled leg quarters where we slashed the meat to the bone four times on each leg quarter. The slashing not only encourages the fat to render but also helps the seasoning get deeper into the meat, creates more surface area to carry flavor, and exposes more of the dark meat so it cooks faster. To add flavor, I whisked lemon, garlic, and chopped sage into olive oil and brushed it on the slashed chicken leg quarters.

Cauliflower needs some moisture to help it soften without drying out in the oven. I cut a head of cauliflower into large wedges and tossed the wedges with a few halved shallots. Instead of covering the cauliflower for the first part of cooking to steam it (as some recipes suggest), I found that the chicken contributed enough moisture to help the cauliflower wedges cook through and brown at the same time without becoming leathery. Arranging the vegetables in the middle of the sheet (where it's cooler) and positioning the chicken legs around the perimeter (where it's hotter) ensured that everything cooked at the same rate.

The recipe was coming along, but the chicken skin, while rendered, was lacking crispness, and the dish as a whole was missing something. Looking for an intense blast of heat to help crisp the skin, I preheated the broiler. But before I broiled, I grabbed a handful of grape tomatoes and tossed them onto the pan. After about 5 minutes under the broiler, the chicken skin had crisped, the top of the cauliflower had browned in spots, and the tomatoes were just barely blistered and wilted, the perfect fresh complement to my hearty chicken dinner.

We position the slashed chicken legs around the outside of the baking sheet, where it's hottest.

ONE-PAN ROAST CHICKEN WITH CAULIFLOWER AND TOMATOES

Serves 4

Note that this recipe calls for kosher salt, not table salt. Some leg quarters are sold with the backbone attached. Be sure to remove it (we like to use a heavy chef's knife for this task) before cooking to make serving easier. If you substitute cherry tomatoes for the grape tomatoes, cut them in half before adding them to the sheet in step 5.

- **1 head cauliflower (2 pounds)**
- **6 shallots, peeled and halved**
- **¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- **2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **4 (10-ounce) chicken leg quarters, trimmed**
- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 teaspoon grated lemon zest**
- **7½ ounces grape tomatoes**
- **1 tablespoon coarsely chopped fresh parsley**
- **Lemon wedges**

1. Adjust 1 oven rack to lower middle position and second rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat oven to 475 degrees. Trim outer leaves of cauliflower and cut stem flush with bottom of head. Cut head into 8 equal wedges, keeping core and florets intact.

2. Gently toss cauliflower, shallots, 2 tablespoons oil, 1 tablespoon sage, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together on rimmed baking sheet to combine. Position vegetables cut sides down in single layer in center of sheet.

3. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Leaving drumsticks and thighs attached, make 4 parallel diagonal slashes in chicken: 1 across drumsticks, 1 across leg joints, and 2 across thighs (each slash should reach bone). Season chicken with salt and pepper. Place 1 piece of chicken, skin side up, in each corner of sheet (chicken should rest directly on sheet, not on vegetables).

4. Whisk garlic, lemon zest, remaining 2 tablespoons oil, and remaining 1 tablespoon sage together in bowl. Brush skin side of chicken with seasoned oil mixture (use all of it). Transfer sheet to lower middle oven rack and bake until cauliflower is browned, shallots are tender, and chicken registers at least 175 degrees, 25 to 30 minutes.

5. Remove sheet from oven and heat broiler. Scatter tomatoes over vegetables and place sheet on upper oven rack. Broil until chicken skin is browned and crisp and tomatoes have started to wilt, 3 to 5 minutes.

6. Transfer sheet to wire rack and let rest for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with lemon wedges.

KEY STEP

Slashing Chicken Legs

Making deep slashes in each chicken leg has several benefits: it helps the seasoning penetrate deeply, creates more surface area to hold seasoning, allows more fat to render, and helps the dark-meat legs cook faster and more evenly.

Illustration: Jay Layman

Cooking for Two Paella

Paella, with its long list of ingredients, can be a production. But does it have to be? BY CECELIA JENKINS

PAELLA IS A RICE dish from the coastal city of Valencia, Spain, traditionally prepared in its namesake shallow, flat-bottomed pan. It is composed of a flavorful base of onion, tomato, and garlic (called *sofrito*); a mix of poultry, game, snails, sausage, and, in more modern interpretations, seafood, pricey saffron threads; and short-grain rice, cooked until the much-coveted brown crust (called *socarrat*) develops on the bottom. It's a labor-intensive process, and when expensive saffron is added to the mix, potentially bank-breaking. We wanted a fast, weeknight version for two that still recognized tradition.

Paellas typically contain several meats browned individually in batches according to their specific cooking times, and the sofrito is created in the flavorful brown bits they leave behind in the pan. I went down this road, browning the chorizo and strips of chicken breast in a 12-inch skillet (the closest thing most of us have to a paella pan) but found it tedious. Did I really need to brown the chicken breast and chorizo? In a side-by-side test, my tasters could tell little difference between a paella that started with searing the sausage and chicken and one in which those proteins were stirred into the sofrito with the rice and broth. So that saved me a little work.

About that sofrito. I made three of them: one using fresh tomatoes, one with canned, and one with tomato paste. My tasters preferred the version with tomato paste, which, when it caramelized, made a beautiful, dark, flavorful sofrito base.

After coating the rice in the sofrito and adding broth, I introduced the meat: chopped chorizo and one boneless chicken breast cut into large pieces so it wouldn't dry out. Unfortunately, not all the breast meat was submerged, which meant the meat cooked unevenly. Flipping the pieces would disturb the rice (a serious paella blunder; rice must be left alone to form the signature socarrat crust) and smaller pieces cooked up tough and dry, so I switched to dark meat in the form of boneless thighs, which stayed put and, because their dark meat is more moist and forgiving, cooked evenly into juicy morsels.

I carefully nestled in the quick-cooking shrimp, which only bothered the rice slightly, and soon the paella began to crackle and pop, indicating browning on the bottom. With patience and a few tries, I discovered that moving the skillet around the flame as the paella sizzled not only helped the crust evenly brown on the bottom but allowed the edges to accurately reflect browning, as well. As they turned from golden to brown, I let the paella rest off the heat, covered, to finish cooking everything through. With a sprinkle of lemon, I enjoyed my paella after less than 50 minutes. I made versions with and without saffron; tasters enjoyed both, so I leave the decision to use it up to you and your accountant.

Smoked paprika and chorizo sausage add a pleasantly smoky depth to this paella

PAELLA FOR TWO

Spanish varieties of rice, while traditional in paella, are sometimes difficult to find, which is why we offer the more widely available Arborio rice as a substitute. Each type of rice requires a slightly different amount of liquid, so note the difference in the recipe. Make sure to use cured Spanish chorizo, not the fresh Mexican sausage, here.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 small onion, chopped
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 bay leaf
- ¾ cup Valencia or Arborio rice
- 8 ounces boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- Salt and pepper
- 2½–2¾ cups chicken broth
- 3 ounces Spanish dry-cured chorizo sausage, cut into ½-inch chunks
- Pinch saffron threads (optional)
- 6 ounces extra-large shrimp (21 to 25 per pound), peeled, deveined, and tails removed
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh parsley
- Lemon wedges

1. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until lightly browned, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in wine, tomato paste, garlic, paprika, and bay leaf and cook until liquid evaporates and mixture looks oily, 2 to 4 minutes.

2. Stir in rice and cook until grains are well coated with tomato mixture, about 1 minute. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Stir in broth (2½ cups for Valencia rice, 2¾ cups for Arborio), chorizo, saffron, if using, chicken, and ⅛ teaspoon salt.

3. Bring to strong simmer and continue to cook, uncovered, over medium heat until liquid level falls just below surface of rice but paella still looks wet, 10 to 14 minutes. (After first 5 minutes of simmering, do not stir or paella will become starchy.)

4. Season shrimp with salt and pepper and nestle halfway into rice. Continue to cook until shrimp are mostly pink and all liquid has been absorbed, 4 to 7 minutes longer (paella will crackle and pop when liquid is absorbed).

5. To develop crust (socarrat) on bottom of paella, continue to cook until crackling and popping sounds become more pronounced, while occasionally rotating skillet over heat for even browning, 3 to 5 minutes. At this point, shrimp should be almost completely pink and paella should look dry on top.

6. Remove from heat, cover, and let sit for 3 minutes. Discard bay leaf. Sprinkle with parsley. Serve with lemon wedges and drizzle with extra oil.

Preparing Paella for a Crowd: Bigger Is Better

Paella is a popular party food, and not just in Spain. To maximize *socarrat*, the crunchy bits from the bottom of the pan, banquet cooks (like these Miami chefs) use huge, shallow paella pans to ensure everyone gets some crunch. The drama is just a bonus.

Photo: State Archives of Florida

Five Easy Recipes Potato Salads

We packed these potato salads with as much flavor as possible by seasoning them in three different stages. BY ASHLEY MOORE

MANY POTATO SALADS FALL victim to one of two cooking crimes: underseasoning or improperly cooked potatoes. We've made enough potato salads to know that it's critical to season them not only after cooking but during, as well. And the cooking needs to be closely monitored to get potatoes with a tender, not mushy, texture.

The first round of seasoning happens before the potatoes—in this case flavorful Yukon Golds—even hit the heat. We start the potatoes in cold, salted water, then we bring it up to just a gentle simmer to ensure that the potatoes cook gently and evenly throughout. A high, rolling boil would cook the outsides of the potatoes before the interiors became tender and result in torn up, rather than tidy, potatoes.

The next step is crucial: drizzling the cooked, drained, still hot potatoes with a quick dressing of mustard and salty dill pickle brine. This—you guessed it—is the second phase of seasoning. As the potatoes cool in the refrigerator, they absorb these savory flavors.

Once the potatoes are cool, we mix some mayonnaise with celery, red onion, and more pickle brine. We add celery seeds to boost the celery flavor and some chopped dill pickles and white vinegar for punch. Then we season this mixture with salt and pepper before stirring it into the potatoes for the final seasoning step.

With a base salad this good, why not doctor it up? I created four variations, including a smoky and spicy one with scallions, cilantro, and chipotle in adobo. With a little garlic and a generous helping of herbs like chives, parsley, and tarragon, I brought the potato salad into green goddess territory. Another, with a hefty amount of prepared horseradish, was nippy and pungent. And finally, adding some ketchup and brown sugar was our ode to Thousand Island dressing.

Clockwise from top: Potato Salad, Green Goddess Potato Salad, Horseradish Potato Salad, Chipotle Potato Salad, and Thousand Island Potato Salad.

POTATO SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

Red Bliss potatoes can be substituted for the Yukon Gold potatoes.

- **2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, cut into ¾-inch chunks**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **¼ cup finely chopped dill pickles, plus 3 tablespoons brine**
- **1 tablespoon yellow mustard**
- **¾ cup mayonnaise**
- **½ cup finely chopped red onion**
- **1 celery rib, minced**
- **2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar**
- **½ teaspoon celery seeds**

1. Place potatoes and 1 teaspoon salt in large saucepan and cover with cold water by 1 inch. Bring to boil over high heat, reduce heat to medium low, and simmer until potatoes are tender, 10 to 15 minutes.

2. Drain potatoes thoroughly in colander, then spread out on rimmed baking sheet. Mix 2 tablespoons pickle brine and mustard together in bowl, then drizzle over potatoes, carefully tossing until evenly coated. Refrigerate potato mixture until cooled slightly, about 15 minutes.

3. Combine mayonnaise, onion, celery, vinegar, celery seeds, pickles, remaining 1 tablespoon pickle brine, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Add cooled potato mixture and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate until well chilled, about 30 minutes. (Salad can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

CHIPOTLE POTATO SALAD

Add 4 thinly sliced scallions, ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro, 1 tablespoon minced canned chipotle in adobo sauce plus 1 teaspoon adobo sauce, 1 minced garlic clove, and 1 teaspoon lime juice to mayonnaise mixture in step 3.

GREEN GODDESS POTATO SALAD

Add ¼ cup chopped fresh chives, ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley, 2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon, and 1 minced garlic clove to mayonnaise mixture in step 3.

HORSERADISH POTATO SALAD

Add ¼ cup prepared horseradish to mayonnaise mixture in step 3.

THOUSAND ISLAND POTATO SALAD

Add ½ cup ketchup and 1½ teaspoons packed brown sugar to mayonnaise mixture in step 3.

Equipment Review Water Bottles

Smart, durable, and spill-proof, one bottle clobbers the competition.

BY HANNAH CROWLEY

KEY Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED	CRITERIA		TESTERS' NOTES
NATHAN LittleShot **Model:** 4313TN **Price:** $11.99 **Capacity:** 24 oz (BigShot is 32 oz) **Material:** Tritan **Dishwasher-Safe:** yes	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★★★ ★★★ ★★★	This bottle's clear plastic sides made it easy to fill, and its bi-level twist-on lid was secure and easy to sip from. Its tether stayed out of the way and folded into a handy carrying loop.
RECOMMENDED			
NALGENE Wide Mouth **Model:** 32 Ounce Wide Mouth **Price:** $10.50 **Capacity:** 32 oz **Material:** Tritan **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★★½ ★★★ ★★★	This basic clear bottle was simple to fill, carry, and clean. It was easy to open and close and aced our durability testing. The only drawback: its wide mouth was harder to drink from.
CAMELBAK Chute .75L **Model:** 53540 (lime) **Price:** $13 **Capacity:** 24 oz **Material:** Tritan **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★★ ★★★ ★★★	This clear bottle had a bi-level screw-on cap, with one opening for filling and one for sipping. Its cap was on a stiff plastic leash and bonked us between the eyes while we drank. But it aced our abuse tests.
VAPUR Element Anti-Bottle **Model:** N/A **Price:** $11.99 **Capacity:** 23 oz **Material:** Triple-ply BPA-free plastic **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★½ ★★★ ★★★	This soft pouch was durable and spill-proof and had a nice drinking spout. Its soft sides were awkward, and we felt in constant peril of squeezing too hard and sending up a geyser. However, it was light and handy for traveling.
RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS			
THERMOS Hydration Bottle with Rotating Meter on Lid **Model:** HP4100MGTR6 (magenta) **Price:** $12.20 **Capacity:** 24 oz **Material:** Tritan **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★★ ★★ ★★★	This clear bottle didn't hold on to smells or stains and had a nice drinking spout. But its finicky latch and cheap plastic button were hard to open; during abuse testing it leaked and the meter for recording water intake broke.
NOT RECOMMENDED			
CONTIGO Autoseal Cortland Water Bottle **Model:** 70601 **Price:** $11.99 **Capacity:** 24 oz **Material:** Tritan **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★½ ★★ ★★★	This bottle's small drinking spout and cap were too fussy. You had to unlock the lid, flip the cap open, and hold a slippery button while drinking. It was complicated, and the cap broke off during abuse testing.
KLEAN KANTEEN "The Origina" Classic **Model:** K27CPPS-GF (green fatigue) **Price:** $19.95 **Capacity:** 27 oz **Material:** Stainless steel **Dishwasher-Safe:** Yes (except painted bottles)	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★★ ★★ ★★	This bottle had an exposed drinking spout made of tacky rubber that collected dust. Its steel body meant that we couldn't see inside, and it dented during the dropping test.
STANLEY Adventure One Hand H20 **Model:** 10-01152-065 **Price:** $20 **Capacity:** 24 oz **Material:** Stainless steel **Dishwasher-Safe:** No	**Ease of Use** **Durability** **Cleanup**	★½ ★½ ★½	This steel bottle had an exposed drinking spout, and we had to hold down a button to release water. The button isn't covered so if something nudged it, say, a shoe in a gym bag, the spout opened. It also dented when we dropped it.

THE ALLEY BEHIND the test kitchen isn't exactly a bucolic place to spend a breezy afternoon, but I, along with a photographer and videographer, had important work to do: dropping refillable water bottles onto the pavement, over and over again, to test their durability. Call it a cold, hard real-world test.

We were evaluating eight different water bottles. There are thousands for sale, so we narrowed our lineup to stick with a few key parameters.

First, we focused on basic single-walled bottles and considered only BPA-free models. (BPA stands for bisphenol A, an industrial chemical used in some plastics. It's currently under review by the FDA, but critics claim that it can leach into food and cause health problems.) Also, we nixed straws because they're difficult to clean thoroughly and tend to get funky fast. We avoided bottles made from glass, too, because it's heavy and, of course, breakable. And we were strict on price; anything north of twenty bucks was out. Our final lineup of eight bottles, each costing between $10 and $20, was made up of five plastic bottles, two stainless-steel ones, and a soft plastic pouch.

We wanted a bottle that was easy to fill, open, close, carry, clean, and sip from. It also had to be spill-proof and exceptionally durable. Before each bottle plummeted toward the pavement, a succession of testers evaluated its basic functionality. We then filled them with an electric-yellow sports drink and let them sit for 24 hours to check for unwanted staining. Some were dishwasher-safe, while others weren't; we hand-washed or ran each through the machine 10 times, depending on manufacturer instructions, to check for wear and tear.

We bought extras of each bottle and assigned them to staffers, with the stipulation that they use them every day for two weeks and take them wherever they go. The bottles went to work in the test kitchen and at local restaurants; they went on long walks around the city, hiking in the mountains, to the gym, and to yoga; they rode in cars, trains, and buses and sat on the couch through Netflix marathons; one even took a weekend trip to Cape Cod.

Meanwhile, we ventured into the alley with our eight testing copies. We shook each full bottle vigorously upside down for 10 seconds and then dropped each from shoulder height onto the hard pavement—upside down, right side up, and sideways. Only half the bottles survived.

The best test for durability? Dropping water bottles onto rock-hard asphalt.

Of the three materials the bottles were made from, the soft plastic pouch was too squishy and awkward for everyday use. The stainless-steel canisters were problematic, too; testers sometimes spilled while filling them because they couldn't see inside, and they dented easily. Our favorite canisters were made of Tritan, a clear, hard plastic. We could see through them for easy filling, and they aced the dropping tests, bouncing off the pavement with nary a scratch.

Testers liked protected mouthpieces, which felt clean on the lips; exposed ones got dirty or dusty. And testers didn't like complex bottles with fussy buttons or finicky, hard-to-undo latches. These complicated bottles were also less durable. More external doodads meant more to break off.

As far as being spill-proof and durable, nothing beat the classic screw-on lid. But some bottles were too wide to drink from easily, while others were so narrow that they were hard to fill and clean. Two bottles with screw-on lids

Water Bottle Boom

Reusable water bottles have expanded well beyond the aluminum canteens familiar to former Boy and Girl Scouts—according to *The Wall Street Journal*, sales of personal water bottles in the United States totaled about $1.5 billion last year. Fans of the reusable containers see them as more environmentally friendly and, after the initial purchase, less expensive in the long run than disposable plastic bottles. Still, bottled water sales continue to grow; U.S. consumers spent more than $12 billion on the stuff in 2013.

tackled this catch-22 by mounting a second, smaller twist-off cap on top of the lid. One bonked us in the face while we sipped—less than ideal. But the final bottle nailed it.

Our favorite was clear: the Nathan LittleShot. It was made of strong, clear BPA-free Tritan and had a smaller twist-on cap that opened and closed smoothly and was easy to drink from; its large opening was great for filling and made cleaning a cinch. It smacked down onto the pavement again and again without spilling a drop and looked nearly brand-new afterward. It comes in 24- and 32-ounce (BigShot) sizes; the former fit easily in larger cup, bike, and backpack holders. Whether you're hiking, lounging, or squished on a bus, the Nathan LittleShot is the best water bottle for staying hydrated on the go.

DID YOU KNOW? All products reviewed by America's Test Kitchen, home of *Cook's Country* and *Cook's Illustrated* magazines, are independently chosen, researched, and reviewed by our editors. We buy products for testing at retail locations and do not accept unsolicited samples for testing. We do not accept or receive payment or consideration from product manufacturers or retailers. Manufacturers and retailers are not told in advance of publication which products we have recommended. We list suggested sources for recommended products as a convenience to our readers but do not endorse specific retailers.

Taste Test Tortilla Chips

Can you judge a chip by its color? BY LAUREN SAVOIE

SALSA IS NOW America's best-selling condiment, so it's not surprising that tortilla chips are poised to soon overtake potato chips as America's favorite salty snack. According to data from IRi, a Chicago-based market research firm, tortilla chip sales grew at nearly double the rate of potato chip sales in 2014.

Tortilla chips are traditionally made from yellow or white corn, but we've noticed an increase in products made with blue corn. We reached out to manufacturers and learned that—for some smaller, health-focused brands—these blue corn products are just as popular as traditional white or yellow corn chips. We gathered seven nationally available tortilla chip products—three made from blue corn and four made from white or yellow corn (if a company made multiple products, we selected its most popular variety). Twenty-one America's Test Kitchen staffers sampled the chips plain and—to see how well they could scoop—with salsa and guacamole.

To our surprise, blue corn chips universally sank to the bottom of the pack. Many tasters detected "slightly bitter," "burnt," or "beany" notes in blue corn chips that stood in stark contrast to the "sweet," "mild" flavor of white and yellow corn chips. How did these pretty chips end up at the bottom of our rankings? Blue corn gets its vibrant hue from large concentrations of pigment-producing chemicals called anthocyanins in its kernels; the same chemicals responsible for the bright color of eggplants, blackberries, and grapes. In addition to a blue hue, anthocyanins can contribute a slightly bitter, astringent flavor to foods, particularly when they're cooked.

Blue chips were also universally lacking in salt, with most having between 60 and 80 milligrams of sodium per serving, compared with 110 to 115 milligrams of sodium in higher-ranked products. Chips with less than 110 milligrams (including one white corn product) were "bland" and "overly sweet." Tasters thought that saltier chips were more "authentic," "fresh," and "bright." We tried salting one of the blue corn chip products to see if it would improve the flavor, but it wasn't enough to mask the beany aftertaste.

Testers dipped the chips in our winning medium chunky salsa and our Hearty Guacamole to evaluate how well each held its shape. While most chips maintained their structure, a few products turned soggy under salsa or crumbled on a drag through guacamole. Tasters preferred thick chips with curved or curled edges that could trap dips. A thicker chip didn't necessarily mean a denser chip, though. We favored chips with large air pockets, which added structural support while still maintaining a crispy, flaky texture that wasn't too dense or stiff.

Our new favorite chips, On The Border Café Style Tortilla Chips, were reformulated right before our tasting, and while the manufacturer wouldn't disclose exactly what it changed, it's certainly doing something right. These chips were light, flaky, and crispy, with a bright corn taste.

RECOMMENDED

ON THE BORDER Café Style Tortilla Chips
Price: $3 for 12 oz ($0.25 per oz)
Type of Corn: Yellow and white
Sodium: 110 mg
Thickness: 3.28 mm

TASTERS' NOTES
This recently reformulated product was praised for its "traditional," "buttery" sweetness and "bright corn flavor." Tasters found these big "flaky" chips "light and airy," with a "bubbly," "crisp" exterior that was "the perfect counterpart to salsa." "I could eat a whole bag of these," said one taster.

TOSTITOS Original Restaurant Style Tortilla Chips
Price: $4.29 for 13 oz ($0.33 per oz)
Type of Corn: White
Sodium: 115 mg
Thickness: 2.39 mm

"Oh, hi, old friend," said one taster, who identified this top-selling product's "familiar," "very salty" seasoning and "large," "sturdy" shape. These "coarse," "crunchy" chips were "built for heavy dipping" and had "simple, straightforward flavor" that testers loved.

SANTITAS White Corn Tortilla Chips
Price: $2 for 11 oz ($0.18 per oz)
Type of Corn: White
Sodium: 115 mg
Thickness: 1.98 mm

Our former favorite, this product was "very salty" and "grainy," with "mellow corn flavor" and "light roasted notes." Though a little too thin for some tasters, these chips were "crisp but strong," with "satisfying crunch" and a "slightly bubbly" exterior.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

GARDEN OF EATIN' Blue Corn Tortilla Chips
Price: $3.99 for 8.1 oz ($0.49 per oz)
Type of Corn: Blue
Sodium: 60 mg
Thickness: 2.72 mm

With the lowest levels of salt in our lineup, these "rustic" blue corn chips were "a little bland" for some tasters, though most appreciated their "mild" earthiness and "grainy" flavor. Tasters also liked the "dense," "thick" texture of these chips, which were good for "sturdy," "supported dipping."

MISSION Tortilla Triangles
Price: $3.49 for 13 oz ($0.27 per oz)
Type of Corn: White
Sodium: 90 mg
Thickness: 2.06 mm

This product, made from all white corn, was "sweet," "mild," and "inoffensive" but was "bordering on too bland" for some tasters. Though these chips could hold a good scoop of dip, many testers noted that the chips quickly turned "soft" and "soggy" under the weight of salsa and "crumbled like a stale tortilla."

FOOD SHOULD TASTE GOOD Blue Corn Tortilla Chips
Price: $3.29 for 5.5 oz ($0.60 per oz)
Type of Corn: Blue (also contains rice flour, quinoa, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, and flaxseeds)
Sodium: 80 mg
Thickness: 1.78 mm

These "hearty," hexagonal-shaped chips are made from blue corn, other grains like quinoa and rice flour, and flaxseeds. While many tasters appreciated this product's "slight sweetness" and "sturdy" texture, others were turned off by its "smoky," "earthy" flavor and "lack of authentic flair."

NOT RECOMMENDED

XOCHITL Blue Corn Chips
Price: $5.29 for 12 oz ($0.44 per oz)
Type of Corn: Blue
Sodium: 103 mg
Thickness: 0.88 mm

These "fragile," "paper-thin" chips had "razor-sharp" edges that cut testers' mouths and shattered in salsa. Most tasters couldn't get past the "burnt toast" bitterness and "beany" blue corn flavor, but those that could noted unpleasant "stale" and "cardboardy" aftertastes.

Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more; that always come out for the holidays; that have earned a place at your table and in your heart, through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit **CooksCountry.com/magazines/home** (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447); click on Heirloom Recipes and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**

SWITCHEL **Makes about 2 quarts**
Hamet Barnstable, New Hope, Pa

"My grandfather told us that when he was growing up in upstate New York, he'd often sip on this sharp, gingery drink during the fall harvest months."

This recipe can be easily doubled. Do not substitute pancake syrup for the maple syrup. Use a rasp grater for the ginger and the lemon zest. The longer you let the switchel chill before straining, the stronger the ginger flavor will be. Feel free to adjust the tartness with water to suit your taste.

- 6 cups water
- ¾ cup cider vinegar
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- ¼ cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- 2 tablespoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- ¼ teaspoon salt

1. Bring all ingredients to simmer in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Once simmering, remove from heat and let cool completely.

2. Transfer switchel to bowl, cover, and refrigerate for at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours. Strain switchel through fine-mesh strainer set over 2-quart pitcher. Serve over ice.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Our October/November issue kicks off the holiday season with a **No-Fuss Roast Turkey**, but that's just the start—we'll fill out the table with **Sourdough Stuffing**, **Cornmeal Drop Biscuits**, and a **Brussels Sprout Gratin** good enough to convert the most stubborn sprout skeptics. For your sweet tooth, we've got **Cranberry Pound Cake**, **Chocolate-Cherry Brownies**, and perfect **Apple Pie**. Still hungry? How about **San Antonio Puffy Tacos**, **Wisconsin Butter Burgers**, or **St. Louis Steak Modiga**? Pull up a chair.

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FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning water bottle, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter, visit **CooksCountry.com/rooster** by September 30, 2015, or write to Rooster AS15, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Ronald Hertzog of Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania, found the rooster in the May 2015 issue on page 12 and won our winning can opener.

WEB EXTRAS

Free for 4 months online at **CooksCountry.com**

Gumbo
Honey-Glazed Peaches
Kielbasa Casserole
Lemon–Poppy Seed Muffins
Pastry Cream
Raspberry-Glazed Peaches
Spicy Feta-Stuffed Chicken Breasts
Splatter Screens Testing
White Layer Cake

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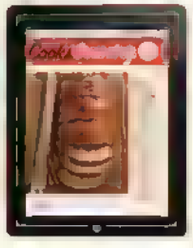

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30 MINUTE SUPPER

BUCATINI WITH BROCCOLINI, CAPERS, AND LEMON

30 MINUTE SUPPER

BEEF AND BEAN BURRITOS

30 MINUTE SUPPER

SEARED SCALLOPS
WITH PICKLED PEPPERS AND COUSCOUS

30 MINUTE SUPPER

PEPPER-CRUSTED PORK TENDERLOIN WITH
ASPARAGUS AND GOAT CHEESE

BEEF AND BEAN BURRITOS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Combining mashed and whole beans adds textural variety to these burritos.

- ½ cup water
- 1 (15-ounce) can pinto beans, rinsed
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chipotle chile powder
- 1½ pounds 90 percent lean ground beef
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 (10-inch) flour tortillas
- 4 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (1 cup)
- 2 cups shredded iceberg lettuce

1. Combine water and half of beans in medium bowl and coarsely mash with potato masher. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until just beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Stir in cumin and chile powder and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add beef, breaking up pieces with wooden spoon, and cook until no longer pink, about 10 minutes. Stir mashed bean mixture into meat mixture. Cook, stirring constantly, until nearly all liquid has evaporated, about 3 minutes. Stir in remaining whole beans and salt. Remove from heat, cover, and set aside.

2. Wrap tortillas in clean dish towel and microwave until soft and pliable, about 1 minute. Arrange tortillas on counter. Divide beef-and-bean filling, cheddar, and lettuce evenly among tortillas. Fold sides of tortillas over filling, fold bottoms of tortillas over sides and filling, and roll tightly. Slice in half on bias and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Serve with sour cream, hot sauce, and lime.

BUCATINI WITH BROCCOLINI, CAPERS, AND LEMON Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We sauté the broccolini with garlic, salt, and pepper until just tender to ensure that it doesn't overcook when added to the pasta.

- 1 pound bucatini
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 12 ounces broccolini, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced thin
- 2 cups chicken broth
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, grated (1 cup), plus extra for serving
- ½ cup capers, rinsed and minced
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return to pot.

2. Meanwhile, heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add broccolini, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until broccolini is just tender, about 4 minutes. Transfer broccolini mixture to plate, set aside.

3. Add broth and wine to now-empty skillet and bring to simmer. Cook until sauce is reduced to 2 cups, about 7 minutes. Add sauce to pasta and toss to combine, adjusting consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Stir in Pecorino, capers, lemon juice, and broccolini mixture and season with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle with extra oil. Serve with extra Pecorino.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can use other long pastas, such as spaghetti or linguine, in this recipe.

PEPPER-CRUSTED PORK TENDERLOIN WITH ASPARAGUS AND GOAT CHEESE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: To build layers of flavor, we cook the asparagus in the flavorful pan drippings the tenderloins leave behind.

- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
- Salt and coarsely ground pepper
- 2 (12-ounce) pork tenderloins, trimmed
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds asparagus, trimmed and cut on bias into 2-inch lengths
- ¼ cup chicken broth
- 2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (½ cup)
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Combine rosemary, 1 tablespoon pepper, and 1 teaspoon salt in bowl. Pat pork dry with paper towels and sprinkle with spice mixture.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook pork until browned on all sides, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer pork to prepared wire rack and roast until 140 degrees, about 15 minutes. Transfer to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

3. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add asparagus, broth, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook, covered, until tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer asparagus to platter and top with goat cheese. Reduce heat to medium-low, add vinegar to now-empty skillet, and simmer until thickened, scraping up any browned bits, about 1 minute. Off heat, whisk in butter. Slice pork, arrange on platter with asparagus, and drizzle with sauce. Serve.

SEARED SCALLOPS WITH PICKLED PEPPERS AND COUSCOUS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Searing the scallops for just 3 minutes enhances their flavor without overcooking them.

- ½ cup finely chopped pepperoncini plus 2 tablespoons brine
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 scallions, sliced thin
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest plus 2 tablespoons juice
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 cup couscous
- 1 cup water
- 2 tomatoes, cored and cut into ¼-inch pieces
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1½ pounds large sea scallops, tendons removed

1. Combine pepperoncini and brine, 2 tablespoons oil, scallions, orange zest and juice, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl, set aside. Melt butter in medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add couscous and cook, stirring frequently, until grains are just beginning to brown, about 4 minutes. Add water, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper; stir to combine, cover, and remove pan from heat. Let stand until tender, about 7 minutes. Uncover, add tomatoes, parsley, and ¼ cup oil and fluff with fork.

2. Meanwhile, pat scallops dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of scallops in single layer and cook without moving them until well browned, about 1½ minutes. Flip scallops and cook without moving them until second side is well browned, about 1½ minutes longer. Transfer scallops to plate and tent loosely with foil. Repeat with remaining 1 tablespoon oil and remaining scallops. Arrange scallops over couscous and top with pepperoncini mixture. Serve.

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PORK CHOPS WITH SAUTÉED ZUCCHINI AND MUSTARD BUTTER

30-MINUTE SUPPER

APRICOT-BASIL CHICKEN SALAD

30-MINUTE SUPPER

FLANK STEAK WITH RED CURRY POTATOES

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PAN-SEARED CHICKEN BREASTS WITH MARINATED TOMATOES

APRICOT-BASIL CHICKEN SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: For a fresh take on chicken salad, we added apricots and basil. Lemon juice and Dijon mustard provide brightness and complexity.

- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup dried apricots, chopped fine
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons minced shallot
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)
- 2 heads Bibb lettuce (1 pound), leaves torn into bite-size pieces
- Extra-virgin olive oil

1. Combine mayonnaise, apricots, basil, shallot, lemon juice, mustard, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Stir in chicken until fully combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Evenly distribute lettuce among 4 plates. Drizzle lettuce with oil and season with salt and pepper. Place heaping ½ cup chicken salad on each plate of lettuce. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: If you can't find Bibb lettuce, substitute red or green leaf lettuce.

PORK CHOPS WITH SAUTÉED ZUCCHINI AND MUSTARD BUTTER Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: A flavorful compound butter of chives, whole-grain mustard, and lemon juice melts quickly on the hot pork chops.

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives
- 1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper
- 4 (8- to 10-ounce) bone-in pork rib chops, ½ inch thick, trimmed
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1½ pounds zucchini, trimmed and sliced ¼ inch thick

1. Combine butter, chives, mustard, lemon juice, cayenne, and ⅛ teaspoon salt in small bowl; set aside.

2. Pat pork dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add pork and cook until well browned and cooked through, about 4 minutes per side; transfer to plate and tent with foil.

3. Add zucchini, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper to now-empty skillet and cook, stirring occasionally, over medium-high heat until tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer zucchini to large platter and top with pork chops. Dollop mustard butter over pork. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: To make sure they cook at the same rate, look for rib chops of similar thickness.

PAN-SEARED CHICKEN BREASTS WITH MARINATED TOMATOES Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Letting the tomatoes and fennel sit with salt for 15 minutes not only seasons the vegetables but also helps extract any unwanted moisture.

- 4 tomatoes, cored and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges
- ½ fennel bulb, stalks discarded, cored and sliced thin
- Salt and pepper
- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (½ cup)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1 shallot, halved and sliced thin
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced

1. Toss tomatoes, fennel, and ½ teaspoon salt in bowl, then place in colander in sink and let sit for 15 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook chicken until golden brown and meat registers 160 degrees, about 6 minutes per side. Transfer chicken to plate, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

3. Transfer drained tomatoes and fennel to large bowl and toss with feta, parsley, shallot, vinegar, garlic, remaining 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Transfer tomato mixture to platter and top with chicken. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Serve with rice or crusty bread.

FLANK STEAK WITH RED CURRY POTATOES Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We make a potent curry sauce using only a few pantry items—all in just 3½ minutes.

- 1½ pounds small Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, quartered
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 (1½-pound) flank steak, trimmed and halved lengthwise
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup red curry paste
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup canned coconut milk
- 2 teaspoons fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves

1. Combine potatoes and 2 tablespoons oil in large bowl. Cover and microwave until potatoes are nearly tender, about 7 minutes; set aside.

2. Pat steak dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook steak until well browned and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 5 to 7 minutes per side. Transfer to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Wipe out skillet with paper towels.

3. Add curry paste, ginger, and garlic to now-empty skillet and cook over medium-high heat until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in coconut milk, fish sauce, and parcooked potatoes, and bring to simmer. Cook until potatoes are tender, about 3 minutes. Slice steak thin on bias against grain. Serve with curried potatoes and sprinkle with cilantro.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Use Yukon Gold potatoes measuring 1 to 2 inches in diameter.

THE GREAT AMERICAN CAKE

Toasted Almond Cake

Layers of tender white cake are filled with creamy, almond-tinged custard and covered with fluffy amaretto buttercream and crunchy caramelized almonds.

To make this cake, you will need:

- **1 tablespoon unsalted butter, plus 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- **2 cups sliced almonds**
- **3 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- **3 cups pastry cream***
- **2 tablespoons amaretto**
- **½ cup heavy cream, whipped to soft peaks**
- **1 teaspoon almond extract**
- **2 (9-inch) white layer cake rounds***
- **Confectioners' sugar**

FOR THE ALMONDS: Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add almonds and cook until light golden brown, about 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Add granulated sugar and continue to cook, stirring constantly, until sugar has caramelized and almonds are deep golden brown, about 3 minutes longer. Transfer to prepared sheet, spread in even layer, and let cool completely.

FOR THE FROSTING: Transfer 1 cup pastry cream to small bowl and let come to room temperature. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat softened butter on medium speed until smooth and light, about 3 minutes. Add room-temperature pastry cream in 3 additions, beating for 30 seconds after each addition. Add amaretto and continue to beat until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes longer, scraping down bowl as needed.

FOR THE FILLING: Using rubber spatula, fold whipped cream and almond extract into remaining 2 cups pastry cream.

TO ASSEMBLE: Cut each cake round in half horizontally. Spread each bottom half with 1 cup filling and replace top. Place one filled cake on cake plate or pedestal. Top with remaining 1 cup filling and place second filled cake on top. Spread frosting in even layer over top and sides of cake. Gently press candied almonds into frosting all over cake. Dust top of cake with confectioners' sugar. Serve.

*Use your recipes or visit **CooksCountry.com/sept15** for our **Pastry Cream** and **White Layer Cake** recipes.

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Bucatini with Broccolini RC

Cedar-Planked Salmon 13

Kentucky-Style Vinegar Slaw 5

Honey Cake 23

Apricot-Basil Chicken Salad RC

Five Easy Potato Salads 29

Ranch Fried Chicken 8

Roast Chicken with Cauliflower 27

Pork Tenderloin with Asparagus RC

Vanilla Frozen Custard 21

Quesadillas for a Crowd 18

Broiled Tomatoes 11

Slow-Cooker Pork Carnitas 26

Sweet Glazed Peaches 21

Stuffed Chicken Breasts 19

Parmesan and Basil Frittata 24

Monroe-County Pork Chops 5

Creamed Corn 15

Grilled Pork Burgers 15

Paella for Two 28

Steak with Curry Potatoes RC

Sweet Potato Cornbread 9